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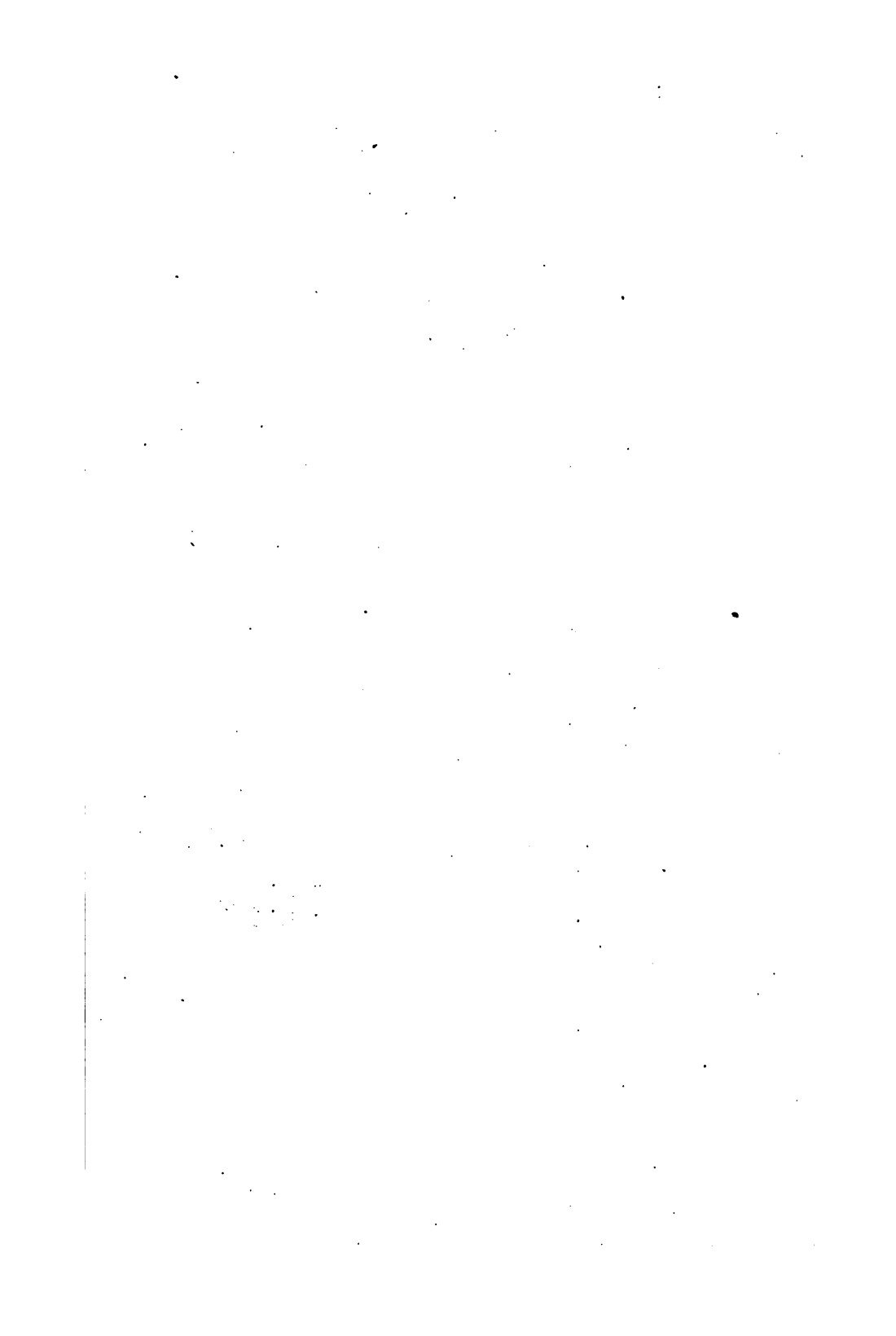


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CONSTANCE HERBERT.

BY

GERALDINE E. JEWSBURY,

AUTHOR OF

"MARIAN WITHERS," "ZOE," ETC.

"Point de Faiblesse."—DANTON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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CONSTANCE HERBERT.

CHAPTER I.

AT the end of about half a mile they arrived before a large, white, double-gabled house, covered all over with roses, and standing in a luxuriant, old-fashioned garden, with a broad gravel walk from the hall-porch, and a large, smooth grass-plot on either side, which came close under the lattice windows. A row of fine elm-trees screened the house from the road. The sun had set, and a clear transparent twilight gave a tranquil, mysterious aspect to the place, for not a leaf was stirring in the soft warm air.

The house door stood open. It was in a deep embrasure, and a passage, paved with bright red tiles, went directly through the house to a door opposite, which, being also open, gave a glimpse of a large farm-yard. Their host flung open the door of a large, low-roofed, old-fashioned sitting-room, where a bright wood fire was burning on the hearth; and, ushering them in, said, "You are welcome to Meriden Farm, ladies, and I am Edward Harrop, the farmer, at your service!"

"Did you ever live at Coventry? and did you ever go to Monsieur D'Egville's dancing school?" said Miss Wilmot, with animation.

"To be sure I did. But who, may I inquire, are you who ask me?"

"And you used to be the best dancer in the school, and you were the model held up to all the rest in the *minuet* and the *gavotte*;

and one evening, at the half-yearly exhibition, before all the parents and friends, the string of your dancing-pumps came untied, and you stumbled and fell in the *pas grave*?"

"I remember it well, though I do not look now as though I had ever learned to dance. Ah, I remember those days well," said he, with a sigh; "but who, then, are you, who know me so well?"

"Do you recollect Sarah Wilmot, who was made your partner because she was the right height; whilst you wished to dance with Amelia Webster, a pretty little girl, with long, yellow, curling hair?"

"And you are Sarah Wilmot? and you knew *her*? If I were glad to see you before, I am twice as glad now. You knew *her*, and can recollect what she was like in those days?"

He spoke with emotion, and quite lost the

formal manner in which he had hitherto addressed them; but the housekeeper, a sedate, middle-aged woman, with a close linen cap, bound by a broad ribbon round her head, and a buff handkerchief pinned down over her gown, came in at this moment, and the interruption threw him back into his old manner.

“These ladies, Mrs. Dawes, are good enough to become my guests for some days; I hope, and I trust to you to make them in all respects comfortable. If you will show them to their rooms, you can then come and see about our supper.”

Mrs. Dawes curtsied, and requested the ladies to follow her. She led the way up a broad, polished, old-fashioned staircase with heavy, twisted balusters. It might have been the most natural thing in the world for her master to find broken-down carriages and to bring the inmates home, so

thoroughly prepared did the good woman appear for the contingency.

“ You will find all the beds well-aired, ladies, and the fires shall be lighted directly. The evenings are chilly in these old houses at this time of the year ; but my mistress, in her lifetime, always made it a rule to keep all the beds ready for use at a moment’s warning, and master keeps up her ways in all things.”

“ Is the mistress dead, then ? ”

“ Yes, ma’am ; she died about this time twelve months. Master took it much to heart. Is there anything you would like, or that I can send up for you ? ”

On being thanked, and her offer declined, she left them, to see about supper.

On descending to the parlour, they found the candles lighted, the curtains drawn, and the table set for the evening meal. At first, conversation was not brilliant—they had

come mutually to the end of the topics which lay on the surface of their adventures, and they had not broken ground upon any topics of general interest.

Sir Charles Grandison, as Constance persisted in calling him, was not much accustomed to general society; and though hospitable in the extreme, he was at a loss to entertain his guests now that he had succeeded in housing them. The "half-hour" before supper was as difficult to manage as ever was the same period "before dinner."

At length Mrs. Dawes and a buxom rosy maid-servant came in with the dishes. The supper was served in a primitive, homely fashion, that partook more of the rustic style of a farm-house than of the customs of genteel society.

A large cold round of beef, a dish of mashed potatoes, a brace of partridges, a hot apple pie, and some toasted cheese, with

brown bread, ale, and cider, was a tolerably substantial repast to set before three ladies.

The duty of presiding at the supper-table appeared to restore their host to his self-possession. He told them, in reply to a question, hazarded by Margaret, about his crops, the price of grain, and many other country gentlemanlike topics, and appeared to address his conversation chiefly to her; but it was evident all along that he wished to say something else, which he could not bring in. After supper he relapsed into his embarrassed formality, and they were beginning to long inexpressibly for their beds, when Mr. Harrop, who had sat trying to make up his mind to say something, turned abruptly to Miss Wilmot, and asked her to come and look at a picture which hung at the other end of the room. She complied. "Do you recollect any one like

that?" he asked. It was the portrait of a young and very pretty woman, of the decidedly English type: flaxen hair, blue eyes, and wild-rose complexion. She was dressed in the height of a bygone fashion.

Miss Wilmot shook her head.

"That was Amelia Webster, my wife," said he, in a hurried tone, "taken just before our marriage; but she was prettier than that, by far."

He stopped suddenly, and seemed nervous at having said so much.

Miss Wilmot spoke with interest of her, and of what she was as a little girl at the dancing school.

Mr. Harrop began an earnest conversation with her. Constance took refuge in some odd volumes of the *Town and Country Magazine*, which were full of old fashions and defunct scandal. Margaret, from time to time, looked at the prints as Constance

appealed to her, but their host seemed engrossed with Miss Wilmot.

At last, the evening came to an end, and they were allowed to retire.

"What has our silent host found to talk about?" cried Constance.

"About his wife, my dear; nothing else, I assure you. I knew her as a young girl."

The next day Mr. Harrop took them to see Kennilworth, which was not far off, and his formality began to disappear. Constance even found him agreeable. Their coach was not yet repaired, and their host protested against all idea of their departure. He persuaded Miss Wilmot and Constance to take a long walk with him, in the afternoon, round his farm. He addressed most of his conversation to Miss Wilmot, and pointed out to her everything that needed to be admired and recognised, giving

her at every point some anecdote of his departed wife. Miss Wilmot listened kindly, but inwardly wondered at the change time had made in her old dancing partner. He kept them with him for three days; towards the end of that time he had brightened up considerably; they all felt quite at their ease with him, and found their visit extremely pleasant. They were sorry to part from him, and gave him a most cordial invitation to visit them as soon as he could make a holiday. Mr. Harrop's embarrassment returned upon him—he said he should be happy, most happy; but, as he handed Miss Wilmot to the carriage, he held her hand, and said, in a confused manner:

“If I am invited, do *you* say that I may come?”

“Certainly,” replied she; “I am sure we shall all be disappointed if you do not.”

“Well, then, I *will* come; you may trust me.”

He wrung her hand with emphasis, colouring to the roots of his hair; he then took leave of the others, and walked beside the coach window until they reached the high road.

“Good-bye, Mr. Harrop,” cried Constance; “we shall send you a summons as soon as ever we are settled at Royton.”

The remainder of the journey passed without further accident or adventure of any kind, and towards the conclusion of the third day after leaving Mr. Harrop’s house, they arrived at the end of their journey.

CHAPTER II.

WE are all of us frequently deceived in our fears as in our hopes. Miss Wilmot had dreaded inexpressibly the first return to Royton. When her nephew, in whom she had garnered so many hopes, had been taken away, and under terrible circumstances, which had seemed to destroy the whole of what future still remained before her, and to leave it desolate, barren, as though sown with salt, and incapable of again producing the smallest object worth living for,—she had thought at first, in her heavy sorrow, that she would see Constance,

and give her the heritage that had fallen to her lot, to save her all pain or scruple; and that done, retire, and sit down desolate and sad, enduring with what patience she might.

But in following that impulse of delicate kindness, she had touched an unsuspected spring, and thrown open the entrance to a new phase of life; a life fertile in new works and days. She had found in Margaret a tender friend, who could comprehend all she had suffered and surmounted; who herself had learned still deeper secrets of sorrow.

In Constance she had found a younger sister, who needed all the care and affection she could bestow, all the strength that may be given through example. From them she had received such companionship and sympathy as she had never dreamed of; and, as though it were destined that nothing should be needed in this new life,

the old hero of her girlish days had come before her, and humbly offered himself for her acceptance.

It was uncertain yet, even to herself, whether she could accept the part thus laid before her; but there was not the least doubt that if she did, all who came beneath her influence would have reason to rejoice. The only real desolation of life is when we are needed by no one, and live moral paupers on the hands of others. Nature is a tender mother; she never did betray the heart that trusted her; and if we will only not cling to our vain regrets, as though they were our idols; if only we will not poison our grief by our own passionate self-love, clinging to our sorrows as though they were idols, she will always heal and strengthen us, even out of the sorrow itself. We "shall be heard in that we fear."

Of course, it was not without a natural pang that Miss Wilmot passed the threshold. The servants, who had served and recollected the old family, were at the door to receive her. They had heard vaguely of the manner of their young master's death; but in those days neither news nor scandal travelled as it does now. They believed he had died in a brain fever, and that Constance would have been his wife had he lived. They were prepared to yield her homage as their lawful mistress, and were overflowing with sympathy towards her. A grey-headed gardener; an erect, stately old woman, who had lived with Sydney's mother without wages, after her misfortunes; her daughter, who did the housework; a young boy, her nephew, who was a servant-of-all-work, completed the modest establishment.

"This is your new mistress," said Miss

Wilmot, presenting Constance to them.
“She stands to me in the stead of him who is gone.”

“Bless her bonny face! She would have made him a rare wife,” said the old man, whilst Mrs. Johnstone sighed, and shook her head; for women of her class enjoy an emotion, even though it is painful.

Miss Wilmot hurried Constance and Margaret into the comfortable parlour, with its crimson paper, hung round with bookshelves and choice prints.

“This is your new home, my dear; and God bless you in it,” said Miss Wilmot, kissing her tenderly.

But after that she made her escape to her own room. She had need to be alone, to control all the emotions that were tumultuously asserting themselves.

Margaret and Constance were bewildered. All was real and substantial round them;

yet they seemed to themselves in a dream.

Mrs. Johnstone came to ask them if they would go to their rooms, and conducted them up a broad, old-fashioned staircase, where the boards were scoured as white as curd, into a large, cheerful bed-room. A wood fire was burning on the hearth, which was inlaid, and all round the chimney, as high as the mantelpiece, with quaint Dutch tiles. Everything was luxuriously clean; but the furniture was homely, plain, birch-wood, polished like a looking-glass; and the carpet was scanty, and did not conceal the white fir boards of the floor. It was furnished in the fashion of a bygone time, but which still lingers in the north,—an honest, wholesome thrift, everything sufficient of its kind, but nothing for show. The bed was hung with white dimity, and the window-curtains were the same. The window

looked towards the road by which they had approached the house. The river could be seen at intervals winding through the valley; then came a wild track of moorland country, and the hills beyond, with plantations of fir-trees here and there. It was quite a different scene to anything Constance had ever beheld. The very colour of the sky seemed different, and the clouds cast a shadow upon the hills as they sailed along the sky.

“Oh, aunt, look, how beautiful!”

“It reminds me of my cottage amongst the mountains. I am glad you will live amongst the hills; there is something noble and heroic in the air we breathe upon the mountains,” said Margaret. “What part of the country is this?” said she, turning to the old woman.

“That is Blackstone Edge that you see before you; the ‘Back-bone of England,’ as

I have heard it called. The young lady must go about and see the places in the neighbourhood. There will be nothing like it where you come from, I reckon."

"No; the country with us is rather flat," said Margaret; smiling, "but it is much greener and more fertile, and we have more trees."

"Ah! well, for those who like them, fields and trees may do; but I like the hills. I am used to them all my life. I once went with Madam Beacham to a flat country, and I felt as though I had come down in the world like. But wont you come away to your own room, it is close to this. Miss Wilmot chose it for you herself, and wrote word you were to have it?"

She led the way along a short passage. Two rooms opening into each other, with a warm aspect, had been fitted up, one as a sitting-room, and the other as a bed-room,

and hither all Margaret's own personalities had been transported, and already old Nanny had arranged it as nearly as she could into the resemblance of her mistress's rooms at the Chauntry. It had been a friendly plot between herself and Miss Wilmot, into which even Constance had not been admitted.

Margaret was as much surprised and pleased as either of them could desire, and it was a greater addition to her comfort than they suspected. The objects were all associated with events in her past life, and she regarded them as household gods of which she did not willingly lose sight.

By this time it had become quite dusk, and Miss Wilmot came to seek them, to go down to tea. She spoke quite cheerfully; but when they came down stairs into the light, her eyes looked heavy with recent tears.

Mrs. Johnstone had exerted herself to provide a plentiful Yorkshire tea, combining all the best features of dinner, tea, and supper rolled into one. The wood fire was piled up with logs, which were blazing and cracking like fireworks. The curtains were drawn and the candles lighted. There was an atmosphere of cheerful, glowing comfort that no heart could resist, and in spite of destiny and dark clouds, and all their stock of sorrows, their spirits rose, and they were very happy. After the tea had been removed, they drew round the fire, and talked over their journey and their adventure, and Mr. Edward Harrop, and their curious improvised visit to him; and Miss Wilmot confided to them what he had said to her at parting.

The best of women, and those who are the least of gossips, dearly enjoy drawing inferences from a communication of this

kind; it is a source of speculation that never fails to stimulate their interest. They all, in their hearts, love match-making; it is an instinct that is born with them, and they cannot help it. Both Margaret and Constance felt themselves instinctively contemplating possibilities which they had not dreamed of an hour before; they would not have confessed such a thing, but he immediately rose in their estimation, and they canvassed his good gifts with a far more definite interest than before.

So passed over the first evening that Constance spent under her own roof. At ten o'clock, Miss Wilmot said that Mrs. Johnstone always read prayers to the household, but she was hoping that the mistress would take it on herself. Constance look confused.

"Oh, yes, by all means, if you will read."

"No, my dear, you are the mistress;

your aunt and I are your guests. You must fill your own place. Shall I ring?"

"If you think it right, yes. I will do it, for, indeed, I feel the need to be thankful."

The household assembled, and Constance, with some shrinking at first, but gathering courage as she proceeded, read aloud the portions appointed for the evening worship, and she prayed in her heart that she might have strength and wisdom to act aright in her new sphere.

The next morning brought business. Constance had to become acquainted with her property, and the duties it would entail upon her. She had not come to sit down as a fine lady in a well-ordered household; there was much to be done and to be seen to. Plenty of occupation and new interests opened out before her.

"I am very glad that I am alive, and that I was not taken at my word when

I was so miserable," said she, to her aunt, when they were alone that evening. "I never expected to feel so content to live. It seems like morning come after a dark night, which one had never expected would pass away."

"My dear child, when you are tempted again to despair, recollect the infinite possibilities that lie concealed in life. Wait patiently—wait, and it will always in good time be shown you that there is something to be done. You never know what the most apparently trivial incident carries within it. If we knew everything, we should be patient as a matter of wisdom; as we know nothing, we must be patient in our ignorance, and trust in Him 'who beholds all things.'"

So time passed on. A letter came in about a month from Mr. Harrop, hoping they had reached home safely, and modestly

requesting that he might receive some tidings of them.

"My dear Constance, we have been very remiss all this time. How is it that we have never written to him?"

"Because, aunt, we have been so busy, and we have been waiting to fix a time for him to come and see us. But now I will write to-day, and tell him I want him to advise me about the farm, and I am sure he will come."

"But where can he stop?" asked Miss Wilmot; "there is not a cottage within a mile of this."

"Oh," said Margaret, laughing, "we are not going to incur the remorse of Uncle and Aunt Selby, by sending out Sir Charles Grandison to an inn. He will come here, of course."

So Constance wrote that very day, begging him to come and see them very soon.

CHAPTER III.

MR. EDWARD HARBOP did not need to be invited twice; he had, in truth, ever since the departure of his guests, been casting about in his mind for a good excuse to avail himself of the wish they had expressed at parting, that he should some time go to see them; but he did not exactly see how he was to bring the cordial generality into a specific time. Since they had left him, his home had seemed more lonely than ever, more lonely than he could endure. He had not any longer the sharp vehe-

mence of his grief to occupy him. Passionately attached as he had been to his wife, he at first believed that if he might live alone, and have no intruders upon his solitary misery, it would be all there was left to desire in this world. But in the twelve months that had elapsed, Time had done its never-failing work; the sharp sting of sorrow was blunted, and it was no longer his companion, filling his mind and occupying all his feelings. He began to feel very dull: he endeavoured to occupy himself by reading and his ordinary farming avocations, but those did not dissipate the intense *ennui* that was weighing him down; the deep depression, which was like grief with all that was spiritual and noble in it evaporated.

When accident brought Miss Wilmot under his roof, he believed that he saw in her the only woman in the world worthy

to replace his lost Amelia. She had known her long ago. She was associated with his own youth; and she was, on her own account, a most excellent and agreeable woman. It did not require all this combination of happy concurrences to make him think a great deal about her, and to cause a sentiment that, if it were not Love, was at any rate a strong pre-occupation in his mind, which became more and more pronounced every day. When the letter which Constance had written, announcing their safe arrival and settling down at Royton Hall, arrived, asking him to fix his own time for fulfilling his promise to visit them, he did not delay to write an answer, but desired his housekeeper to pack his saddlebags, and, mounting his horse, started within two hours after the receipt of the letter.

Of course he had plenty of excellent reasons for so much despatch; he was not

impatient—not at all; it was never his character to be impatient, but it was a slack time; he could very well be spared from the farm just then, and in a week or so there would be no telling when he could get away; besides, he wished to go through Sheffield, where he could meet with some improved agricultural implement which had just been brought out; he should have plenty of time; and *besides*,—that word “besides” is a sunken rock in the sea of reason; more good arguments are stranded upon it than on all the specious sophisms that endanger poor mortal ideas.—“Besides,” no women, and very few men, find their logic strong enough to tide them handsomely over that point in an argument—a good reason is seldom found after a “besides.” Mr. Edward Harrop spurred his horse when he came to “besides,” and did not look closely to see where it led.

As he proceeded on his journey he decided to make the best of his way at once to the far end, and to take Sheffield on his return. There was no harm in this at all. If any accident should occur, it would, as he justly reflected, be better to lose his visit to that place than to lose Royton Hall. Accordingly he made the very best of his way; the journey was upwards of a hundred miles, and the roads, on the latter part of the way, rough and hilly, but his horse was strong, and made to exert himself, so that he took no more than three days before he alighted at Royton Hall.

The inmates were all taken by surprise at such a speedy following up of their invitation. The holiday, the change of scene, the hopes that he could not help entertaining, had all conspired to brighten his spirits; and he looked so much younger and more buoyant, that when they saw him they

were all tempted to think they had made their first acquaintance with him under some disguise. Margaret laughed outright to think of the sad-looking, formal, middle-aged gentleman she had been expecting; Constance wanted confidence when she reflected upon the free off-hand style of invitation she had written to him; and Miss Wilmot was quite confounded at the precipitate course things seemed to be taking. However, they were all glad to see him, and received him with so much cordiality that he was quite rescued from the misgiving that had seized him as he came in sight of the Hall.

He soon became quite at home amongst them. He was a gentleman and a man of cultivated mind, but had lived so long alone, that he had almost forgotten the pleasure of social intercourse, and almost needed to learn to speak; but that soon came back to him, and it was a pleasure he relished all

the more keenly for its long suspension. He was delighted to find that Constance needed his advice in farming matters; it took off, as he fondly imagined, all awkward particularity from his visit; for he had grown as shy before Miss Wilmot as if he had been a young boy. The truth was, that the good man had fallen honestly and genuinely in love with her, in spite of all his previously fixed ideas that his heart was quite dead and buried in the grave of his lost wife.

As to Miss Wilmot, she had led such a nun-like state of existence for so many years, that she was at first startled, not to say frightened, at tacitly keeping on her acquaintance with a man who was so particular in his attentions to her, and whom she believed she never would or could encourage. Mr. Harrop, the very day after his arrival, had had the good instinct to

make Margaret the confidante of what he hoped and desired, and he had the good sense to follow her counsel; hence it came to pass that poor innocent Miss Wilmot never had the chance of *discouraging* him.

Meanwhile, he became quite domesticated amongst them. Constance declared he was just like a relation, and Margaret cautiously expressed her very favourable opinion of him. Underneath his formal manner there was so much genuine kindness of heart, such an affectionate child-like disposition, that no one could help becoming attached to him as they came to know him. He remained with them for ten days, which was equivalent to a twelvemonth's ordinary acquaintance; but Miss Wilmot having, as we have seen, got a fixed idea that she could never marry, did not in the least suspect that any treacherous melting of her resolution

was in progress, or, indeed, that it was kept in shape by nothing but the varnish of consistency, with which women especially try to strengthen their mind whenever they "make it up;" but which, somehow or other, generally melts off into very fantastic shapes.

The last morning of his visit, when he could prolong his stay no longer, he resolved once more to try his fate at her hands. Margaret contrived that he should have an opportunity of speaking to her alone; but she warned him not to be too sanguine, nor yet to lose heart if she at present refused to listen to him; a *juste milieu* which human nature in general, and the human nature of lovers especially, finds it peculiarly easy to hit!

He began by speaking of his late wife, and told her it was an attachment that began when they were boy and girl at the dancing-school. He told her what

a good woman she was, and spoke of his affection for her in a manly, straightforward manner. He spoke with a genuine feeling that was almost eloquent, and made him quite forget his embarrassment. He could not have taken a better plan for making a good impression on Miss Wilmot; it interested her in his story; and when he went on to tell her how lonely and miserable he had lived since her death, she grew quite pitiful for him; and when he told her that she was the only woman he had ever seen besides whom he even desired to marry, and told her how very lonely the house had been since her departure, he made such an appeal to her charity and benevolence, that she became moved, and began to fancy that it was in some sort a moral obligation laid upon her not to refuse to be what consolation she could to him.

The surest appeal to any woman who is essentially good-natured, is to set before her what is desired in the light of a *good deed*; any personal advantage would, in all probability, take no effect; but, clothed in the shining radiance of a good deed, she will give her consent, and not examine too curiously whether it be Satan transformed into an angel of light. In fact, very kind-hearted people cannot in the nature of things be strictly logical either in their deeds or their ideas.

Miss Wilmot could not, however, be brought all at once to agree to such a wholesale piece of magnanimity as to marry a man for the sole sake of making him happy; but she had begun to pity him very sincerely, and to sympathize with him in the picture he had drawn of his loneliness; and that was a great deal gained. He had the sense to press for nothing further at

present, but took his leave, declaring that the past week had been "a bright oasis in his life," which struck Miss Wilmot as very touching and poetical, although it can scarcely be called original; but it touched her as coming from him.

After his departure, things returned to their ordinary course. Mr. Harrop wrote frequently. Sometimes it was to Constance, a letter full of farming counsels, and shrewd country-gentlemanly advice on different matters connected with landed interests; at other times it would be a letter to Margaret, containing touching details about his personal proceedings, — all cunningly intended to be communicated to Miss Wilmot. Once or twice he wrote to her direct, making the excuse about the condition of the cottages on his estate, and asking her to draw some plans and elevations, both for cottages and a school-house, for

Miss Wilmot had a special talent that way.

By these means he contrived to keep himself fresh in their memory; and the week was considered on both sides very barren in interest which did not bring at least one long letter, written as letters used to be when they cost money, full from end to end, and closely packed. During the winter, the heavy snow-storms made the roads impassable, and the communication was interrupted for a week together; but the letters were always written, and when the thaw came, they arrived in a flock, none the worse for their detention.

The only incident worth recording that occurred during this winter, was the serious illness of Margaret. She caught a violent cold, which ended in bronchitis, and she had to confine herself entirely to her room until the spring set in. Although the immediate

danger passed over, the ensuing spring saw Margaret much broken in strength, and needing the greatest care and precaution. She herself knew the precarious tenure by which she held her life; but her companions were sanguine, and hoped everything from the warm weather. The doctor said that she must not pass another winter so far north, and Margaret did not think it likely that she ever should.

The only allusion, however, which she made to herself, was one day, when alone with Miss Wilmot, she said,—

“If you were married, it would be a great anxiety off my mind as regards Constance. She will need some friend to stand by her like a relation. Her own father will never undertake his proper relationship towards her: he has not the strength of character to be her guardian. I never saw a man so morally gone to wreck.”

"He used to be so different," said Miss Wilmot, with a sigh. "I hope you will be long spared to Constance; what would become of her without you, I do not know."

"Do not give way to idle hopes," said Margaret, abruptly; "my life I know not to be worth an hour's purchase. But now, tell me truly, are you clinging to the ghost of constancy; and, because you were once disappointed, do you still believe that Charles Herbert is the only man the world contains worthy of your love?"

"My dear friend, when that heavy sorrow came upon me, I believed sincerely that I could never love any other man. I did not blame him for an instant for the part he acted. I did not see that either he or I could do otherwise; and I felt glad to think that, by setting him free, cheerfully and readily, I proved my love for him in a manner he could never doubt, and I pleased

myself with thinking that he must recognise it. I should be ashamed to tell you how completely I lived upon the idea that he would always think of me as one who loved him well, and I thought I 'would always be constant to him. Other interests and duties arose in life, and this strong idolatry to him did not die, but fell into abeyance. No other attachment of a similar nature took its place, but I was taught to be content.

"I will not speak of him who is gone. I loved him as though he had been my child. When he was taken away, I murmured, 'my punishment was greater than I could bear'—and 'what had I done to deserve so heavy a stroke to be laid on me?' I was mad and rebellious; but, thank God, a better spirit was put within me, and then I found you and dear, dear Constance. Oh, you do not know all that you have both been to me! And

then, that no shadow of regret, of discontent, might be left to linger in my mind, I saw Charles Herbert again. I was frightened at the difference between the object I had been obstinately regretting, and for the loss of whom I had secretly felt that I had been magnanimous in not repining, and the real Charles Herbert as he stood there before me!

“Do you know, that night, when I reached my own room, I kneeled down, and thanked God with all my heart that He had kept me from my own desires. I never felt so thankful at any moment of my life as I did then for the heaviest trial that had ever befallen me!”

“Well, and now tell me, how do you feel disposed to poor Edward Harrop?”

“I am not in love with him—not as I was with Charles Herbert; but I have a strong regard for him, and could like to have

him always for my companion. I could rely upon him entirely, and I feel very grateful to him for his partiality; and if he still thinks that it would make him happy to have me for his wife, I do not think I should wish to refuse him."

"Capital!" cried Margaret, laughing; "he ought to go down on his knees to thank you. He must be very *exigeant* if he requires more. Dear friend, I wish you could know all the happiness it gives me to think that you, whose nature is so richly endowed with all the qualities that would make a perfect wife and mother, at last have a chance of fulfilling your vocation! Now I will tell you a secret, for surprises are bad for the nerves: Edward Harrop will be here the day after to-morrow, to learn his fate from your own lips. Here, read what he says in his last letter to me."

"I can live on hope no longer; the

glimpse of happiness that might still be mine bewilders and unsettles me. I must know the ground I stand upon: the hardest reality is better than the loveliest dream."

"So, my dear, put on your considering cap, and do not drive a worthy man to despair, unless you feel it a very imperative duty."

Mr. Harrop did not fail to arrive. Absence had made him more in love than ever. It had given a touch of imagination to his sentiment, which had beautified even Miss Wilmot. At the end of three days he had another private conversation with her, which came about by the merest accident. She and Constance were in the garden; and when Mr. Harrop joined them, Constance left them to give her aunt some melted jelly, which she always took at that hour, and Mr. Harrop so far profited by the opportunity to plead in his own behalf,

that when, an hour afterwards, she entered Margaret's room, she burst into tears, and told her she had accepted him!

But she seemed very happy, notwithstanding. Constance was delighted: and as to Mr. Harrop, everybody wondered how they could have fancied him a grave, elderly gentleman! Miss Wilmot said he looked like what she recollected him five-and-twenty years ago!

CHAPTER IV.

It was settled that the wedding should take place in June, at the residence of Miss Wilmot's uncle. Mr. Edward Harrop pleaded hard to be married during this visit, and to take his wife home with him; but to this neither Miss Wilmot nor Margaret nor Constance would listen for a moment, and he considered himself an ill-used man; but as all men are unreasonable,—it is their normal state,—a man in love cannot be expected to be otherwise.

It is an old story that “much would

have more," and the Ginn in the "Arabian Nights," who, on being let out of the small bottle in which he had been imprisoned, spread himself out over unlimited space, must have been the Genius of human wishes. But as it is far too late in the day to hope to make any observations which shall be original on such a subject, we will merely relate that Mr. Harrop at length took his departure, with the consoling reflection that the fourth of June *must* arrive at its usual time.

At the beginning of April there was a week of charming spring weather, and our three friends commenced their journey to London by easy stages. Margaret was very anxious to be near her own physician; she had fears, which she kept to herself, lest she might not live until the marriage took place. However, the journey seemed to agree with her, and she appeared to rally

when they were settled once more in London. Constance felt the breaking-up of the constant companionship there had been with Miss Wilmot, who returned to her uncle's residence, and the shadow of her own sorrow again fell upon her; but she struggled bravely not to seem sad, and the weight that was in her heart lay out of sight. No tidings had reached her of Phillip, except that once her father, in one of his letters, mentioned that Mr. Marchmont was still in Paris, and that his son was travelling.

Charles Herbert's letters were few and far between, and their details of his proceedings were always of the vaguest kind. His last letter had been dated from Vienna; he spoke of having been ill, and of his intention to try the baths of Marienbad. This now was eight months ago, and both Margaret and Constance had

begun to feel anxious for further intelligence of him, but they had no means of writing, as he had neglected to give them any address, and their last letter, written on a venture to Vienna, had come back with the intimation that Mr. Herbert was not there.

“I would like to go and visit poor mamma, again,” said Constance, about a week after they were in London. “I have been thinking that I should like to take her to live with us at Royton. I would take care of her. I cannot bear the thought that she should be living apart from everybody, as though she were a leper. It would do me good to have her with me; I should then feel as if I had some positive duty to engage me; the things one does of one’s own accord, do not occupy one like the duties which are laid upon us by Providence, and surely I have duties towards my mother.”

"We will consider about it. If your father were to return to live at home, your first duty would be towards him; and he could never bear the constant sight of your mother, in her present state. She is, happily for her, entirely unconscious of her situation; she is well cared for, and I doubt whether it would be well for you to have the spectacle of her infirmity before you constantly. If ever it should become necessary for you to take her to live with you, be sure that it will make itself apparent and unquestionable. Go to see her, but let us wait before we make any change."

Constance went that day to see her mother, and returned to her again and again.

She felt remorse for the indifference in which she had lived for so many years, as to whether she had a mother or not; and

now her heart was full of intense pity for her; it was more like a sentiment of maternity than the feeling of a daughter towards her mother. Also, she felt that it strengthened her own heart against vain regrets for the course she had taken. When she looked upon her mother, she realized the inexorable necessity by which her own life was controlled, and grew calm before it.

It is the restless drifting to and fro, the beating about amongst hopes and fears, and wild possibilities of things being otherwise, that makes sorrow maddening; once convinced that *we*, at least, have only one thing to do, which is to submit, we cease to break ourselves against sharp regret. It is wonderful (and is true, morally as well as physically) what an immense weight we may support without being crushed, if it only continues—still.

Her anxiety about her aunt gave her

infinitely more pain than any other feature in her destiny, not that she would have owned to herself that she was seriously alarmed, she hoped; but hope is only another phase of fear, and the possibility of failure is always the most vivid part of the sentiment.

Meanwhile there were preparations to be made for Miss Wilmot's marriage. A certain amount of sewing and new clothes seems to be indispensable to a lawful marriage. Constance entered into the business heartily; and though Miss Wilmot could not fail to look back to the time when she was preparing for a similar event, still it was with no morbid sentiment, but a genuine thankfulness that she had not had the choosing of her own lot in life, and with confidence "and patient cheer" she entered upon the new sphere that had opened before her.

Mr. Harrop arrived in London some days before the one appointed for the marriage, and was the guest of Margaret and Constance. Constance was to be Miss Wilmot's bridesmaid, and Margaret was to be present at the ceremony. Mr. Harrop had brought a friend with him whose father Margaret had known in her youthful days.

At last the fourth of June actually arrived, —a lovely summer day,—and Miss Wilmot, in her bridal dress of silver-grey satin and quaker-like bonnet; her sweet, tranquil face nearly as handsome, if not so brilliant, as she had been nineteen years before. She was now only eight-and-thirty, a time of life when women still have pretensions to be the heroines of novels, although it may be a somewhat mature age to be married.

Constance looked very lovely in white India muslin. The bridegroom (we are sorry to record such an unbecoming fact,

but it was the rigorous costume of the day) wore a blue coat with gold buttons, and a face that looked irresistibly happy. Miss Wilmot's uncle was too old and too infirm to go to church, so an old friend of the family acted in his stead.

After the ceremony there was a breakfast. They were all very quiet and silent, but no tears were shed, except by the poor old uncle, who confounded this marriage with the one that was formerly to have taken place, and called Mr. Harrop, Mr. Herbert; but those present were too thoroughly contented with the present state of things to be in the least disconcerted by the mistake.

At length the breakfast was over; the bride had put on her travelling-dress, and the carriage was at the door to take her away.

“Good-bye, dear Constance. Remember,

you are to follow us in a month. I shall not give you a day's grace, but shall send Edward out to look for you."

"God bless you, my dear child," said Margaret, holding both her hands; adding, in a low voice, "Be a mother to Constance when I am taken away."

"I consider Constance like my own sister," said Edward Harrop, "and she shall never want a brother so long as I live."

Margaret bowed her head; she could not trust her voice to speak. Constance did not hear what was passing—she was taking leave of the little dog that was to go along with his mistress to her new home.

At last the carriage drove away, and in a few minutes afterwards, Margaret, Constance, and Mr. Dellincourt, the groomsmen, set off on their return home.

CHAPTER V.

THE afterpart of a wedding-day is always melancholy; there is an inevitable collapse from which the best-regulated minds cannot rally for at least twenty-four hours.

“What shall we do with ourselves?” cried Constance. “Our ordinary employments look quite dingy. I suppose I am not in the vein to set about anything.”

“Let us go to the theatre and see Young,” said Mr. Dellincourt; “though it certainly is an ominous play,—‘The Stranger.’”

“I am not afraid of omens for our friends,” said Constance, gaily; “and I

have never seen Young, yet. Do let us go, dear aunt."

"You may go with Mr. Dellincourt, with all my heart; but I am not equal to accompanying you. I think it is an excellent idea; but I wish it had been a less dismal play for your entertainment. I recollect the torrents of tears I used to shed over it."

"But 'Venice Preserved,' and 'The Fatal Marriage,' and 'The Gamester,' are all one more miserable than the other; and we might have fallen on any of those, and I own to preferring a deep tragedy to the best comedy that ever was played," said Mr. Dellincourt.

"And so did your father before you," said Margaret, laughing. "I remember, as if it were yesterday, how he, one evening, crept into a dark corner of the box to cry unobserved, and his sobs betrayed him. I

forget the name of the play which so moved him, but he never spoke the whole evening after; and he told me afterwards that it made him unhappy for three days! I call that seeing a tragedy to some purpose."

Margaret did not appear to be much fatigued. She seemed better, and in better spirits than she had been for some time. Constance felt no anxiety at leaving her. She was very anxious to see Young, and, after an early tea, she and Mr. Dellincourt set off in high spirits.

Margaret stood at the window to see them drive away. Constance looked out as the coach turned the corner of the street — Margaret still stood looking after them.

"Dear heart!" said old Nanny. "I hope Miss Constance will get up her fine spirits again; it did me good to hear her laugh as she went off just now. But you will not be thinking of sitting up for her? If

I had my way, you should go to bed now. You will be ill to-morrow, after all this."

"I am ill now, I think. Within the last few minutes I have a strange feeling in my head that I never had before, and it extends down my right arm."

"Is it the pain?" asked Nanny, anxiously.

"No; it is a tingling numbness. It is better now. I will go to bed; I feel as though I should sleep well to-night."

"Will you not send for the doctor? He said you were to send for him the moment you felt yourself ill. You had better let me send David."

"No, no; I am only sleepy and fatigued. Constance will be home early. I shall have wakened up again by that time."

Had it been one of her ordinary attacks of spasms, Nanny would have been alarmed; but her mistress had been so much better all the day, and gone through so much un-

usual fatigue, that she had no misgiving about the drowsiness, but got her into bed as quickly as possible. In half-an-hour she perceived a change in the breathing and the countenance of Margaret. She despatched a messenger for a medical man, and another to the theatre for Constance, but with little hope that he would succeed in finding her.

In the meantime, Constance was at the play. The house was crowded, and it was a most brilliant scene. In spite of her strong-minded resolutions, Constance was obliged to pay tribute to the genius of the acting, and to shed her tears like any other ordinary mortal. She was completely absorbed in what was passing, until the curtain dropped at the end of the third act.

"Are you ill? or what is the matter?" asked her companion, anxiously. "What has come over you so suddenly? Is it the heat?"

"No, I am quite well. You will think me foolish, but I wish to go home. I feel an inquietude I cannot describe. I am sure something is amiss with my aunt. I cannot rest here till the end of the piece. Will you take me home now—directly?"

"Of course I will, if you wish it. But do not alarm yourself without cause; you are only fatigued, and your nerves are overwrought. But we will go at once; lean on my arm."

With some difficulty they made their way out. The anxiety of Constance increased every moment. Mr. Dellincourt called a coach, and ordered the man to drive quickly. They neither of them spoke during the course.

Old Nanny met them at the door.

"Thank God you are come, Miss Constance. How did David find you out?"

"I have not seen him. But my aunt—what has happened to her?"

"She has not been just so well. I thought you would like to be with her, and I sent David to try to find you out in the theatre. The doctor has been, and will come again in half-an-hour. He is only just gone. Now, keep yourself quiet, Miss Constance, and do not look in that way. You know how it would distress her if she came to herself and saw you."

Constance flew rather than walked to her aunt's room. At the door she stopped; by a violent effort she controlled her excitement, and entered the room as quietly as though it were empty. Margaret sat propped up with pillows; the windows were open, and the room was in disorder. Blood was slowly trickling down her temples, where leeches had been applied, and a woman was bathing them with hot water.

Margaret did not seem unconscious when Constance approached, but her senses were dull and numbed. She turned her eyes heavily upon her, and made an attempt to speak; but her lips were swollen and powerless, and her voice was an inarticulate murmur in her throat. This semi-consciousness lasted only an instant; her eyes closed, and she breathed heavily.

The doctor returned, and tried other remedies, but without success. The breathing became less painful, but consciousness never returned. The slumber was deepening towards death.

Constance sat by the bedside during those hours, gazing upon her face with a stupified intentness, sensible neither of grief nor fear, watching only for a ray of recognition, and never removing her eyes, lest the one precious moment should escape. The candles seemed to burn darkly, and

the room grew chill as the night wore on. The servants crept stealthily through the open door from time to time, to learn how things were going. Nanny leaned on the board at the bed-foot, and watched her mistress as intently as Constance. The old nurse sat in an arm-chair, and dozed, contenting herself with rising, from time to time, and giving a look towards the bed, shaking her head with a grim, official sympathy.

There was a grand ball going on, on another side of the square; the sound of the music and the noise of the carriages came through the open windows, and the bright lights gleamed across the darkness.

By twelve o'clock all was over in the chamber of Death.

Without any return of consciousness, but without pain or struggle, Margaret Herbert passed away, at the age of sixty-eight.

CHAPTER VI.

THE next morning all was in the sad, suppressed bustle and excitement which always follows a death in the house. The natural grief has to be suspended to give place to the prosaic and material details which, however inevitable, rob the aspect of death of its awful mysteriousness.

To the undertaker and his men, the dead are invested with no solemnity, they are merely *items* in the funeral,—“parties to be interred,” taking their place with the scarves, hatbands, and first or second-class

feathers, as the case may be. The deepest grief and most terrible bereavement they witness from behind the impenetrable breastplate of "a matter of business."

Had it not been for the accidental presence of Mr. Dellincourt, Constance would have been in a very desolate condition; he undertook all the arrangements, and gave all the necessary orders.

Constance had been removed almost by force from the bedside, to which she clung with the tenacity of convulsion. She did not shed a single tear, but gazed, with a stony despair, on the calm face of death. The medical man, who arrived a few minutes after all was over, assisted to remove her to another room, and administered a composing draught, which she swallowed mechanically when it was placed to her lips. He then desired that she might be undressed and laid in bed, impressing upon

old Nanny that she must on no account be left alone even for a minute.

It was a great blessing to poor old Nanny that there was a call upon her attention; her anxiety about Constance diverted the grief that would have overwhelmed her. Mr. Dellincourt wrote to the Harrops, but it would unavoidably be several days before they could receive the letter, as they were to diverge from their direct road to pay a visit to an old friend of Mr. Harrop's, who had been prevented by an attack of gout from being present at the wedding; to send the letter to them there, would have been unavailing, as it was across the country, and no direct post. His only hope was that they would only delay a day there. He was very anxious that Constance should be under Mrs. Harrop's care as soon as possible.

A memorandum, written by Margaret,

and dated about a week previously, was found in her pocket-book; it contained plain directions as to what Constance was to do in case of her death occurring unexpectedly, and instructions where her will was deposited, and where Constance might obtain all necessary funds.

Margaret had foreseen everything, and provided for everything, so far as it was possible.

It was the second day after Margaret's death, that early in the morning a hackney-coach drove up to the door. The housemaid, who was only in the act of getting up, hastened to answer the impatient summons, and Charles Herbert, pale and haggard from the fatigue of a long journey, ascended the steps. The housemaid was a country girl, whom Margaret had brought up with her from Royton, and had never seen him before.

"Are you the undertaker, please sir?" said the girl. "Mr. Dellincourt is not up yet."

"I! what do you mean? Is any one dead?"

"Yes, please sir, the missus, and I thought you were come about the funeral. Mr. Dellincourt gave out word that he was to be called as soon as anybody came."

"And who the devil is Mr. Dellincourt? Has Mr. Marchmont left this house? Is David here?—send him to me."

The girl looked glad enough to make her escape; and Charles Herbert stood impatiently in the hall, not knowing what to think of his strange reception.

His only idea was that Mr. Marchmont had let the house, for some reason or other. At length David made his appearance, with a face full of sorrowful importance.

"Oh, Mr. Herbert! I am glad you are come! It will be a great comfort to Miss Constance. You have heard what has happened?"

"What *has* happened? tell me, and be quick."

"The missus is gone, and poor Miss Constance is breaking her heart."

Charles Herbert staggered back against the wall. The man supported him to the nearest room, and placed him in a chair, whilst he threw open the shutters.

"Will you let me get you something, sir? you are very ill."

Charles impatiently motioned to him that he would have nothing.

"It was awfully sudden, sir," continued the man. "We did not know where to find you; and if it had not been for Mr. Dellincourt, there would have been no one

to give the orders. He came up to the marriage."

"Whose marriage?" said Charles, more and more bewildered.

"Miss Wilmot's as was, sir. Miss Constance was bridesmaid; and missus was quite well in the morning, and went to church with them; but it was too much for her, and she was took ill, and died that night."

"Good God, how dreadful!" gasped Charles. He began to tremble violently, his face was livid and contracted, a violent nervous crisis ensued, which looked very alarming. The servant did not know what to do. He hurried away, and sent the coach, which had not yet been discharged for a medical man, and ran to prevent, if possible, the other servants from disturbing Constance; but his precautions were vain, for the housemaid had already aroused her,

and she entered the room where her father was lying, just as the attack was at the worst.

Constance was perfectly calm; and with the assistance of old Nanny, who followed her, she bathed her father's head with cold water, and rendered him the assistance which the servant had been too much alarmed to think of. But she did it mechanically, without evincing surprise or emotion of any kind.

When the medical man arrived, he pronounced Charles Herbert to be on the brink of a serious illness, which must have been hanging about, and the sudden shock had precipitated. He ordered him at once to bed. Old Nanny endeavoured to prevail on him to forbid Constance to exert herself; but he declared it was the best thing that could have happened for her.

Constance seemed suddenly endowed with

the foresight and decision of half a dozen persons. She gave orders quietly, and saw them executed, took her own place beside the bedside of her father, and proceeded to carry out minutely all the doctor's directions; but it was all done as if she were in a trance. No emotion of any kind disturbed the marble rigidity of her features. She was like one turned to stone. All that the kindest and most thoughtful brother could have been, Mr. Dellincourt proved himself at this time of trial; but Constance appeared to be altogether unconscious of his services.

The day before the funeral, an elderly man-servant out of livery came to the house, requesting to see Nanny. Nanny recognised in him the individual who had been her fellow-servant in Italy, and who had returned to England when his master quitted Margaret.

"My lord has shut himself up and seen no one since he heard of the death. I did not think he had so much feeling left. It has broken him a great deal."

"I always knew it would come home to him, sooner or later," said Nanny; "but my mistress had recovered from all the evil he had brought upon her, long before she was taken away, so far as being unhappy was concerned. She had no cause to reproach herself, and it is only that which makes sorrow endless."

"My lord bid me ask you, if I had the opportunity, whether she left any message with you for him?"

"Tell your lord that my mistress never named his name, and it is my opinion she had allowed him to pass from her mind as one not worth remembering."

"He has never properly been friends with himself since he left her. He repented

of it once, and that was always. He has taken the news of her death very hard."

"Maybe he thinks his own turn will come next," said Nanny, sarcastically; "for do not think he is one to be sorry about anything that does not concern himself."

"He bid me inquire at what time the funeral was to leave the house. It is my opinion that he intends to follow it."

"He did his best to send her to the grave when she was in the prime of life, and it is just mockery to try to ease his conscience by following her funeral at this time of day; and he may learn what he wants to know from somebody else, for I will not tell him."

Nanny's heart had always been filled with a deadly indignation, and this opportunity of giving it utterance was a consolation in the midst of her grief.

The messenger departed, and apparently obtained the requisite information elsewhere; for the next day, when the *cortége* left the house, it was joined by a close dark chariot, with a coronet on the panels. Inside, there was an old, pale, stern-looking man, who gazed straight before him, with a dreamy, vacant gaze. He was thinking of the past more than the present; of the days when he and Margaret were in Italy; and she had been the wife of his youth. The difference that comes in life is oftentimes nearly as great as that between life and death. He had done a grievous wrong to the woman to whom he had given the strongest pledges that could induce one human being to trust another, and now, what remained to him of all the objects for which he had broken his faith? To what purpose had been all the waste he had made of that inner life which makes the

truth and beauty of what is seen? Verily, this world passes away, and the grace and the fashion of it perishes.

All his past life looked so near and so clear, it seemed as though he could reach it; but the hundred years that lie before us, are nearer than the moment that has just passed.

In the household Margaret had left, life continued its resistless sweep. The gap she had left was even now beginning to be drawn together. Every day brought its own incidents, which arranged themselves into completeness without any reference to her who had been.

Charles Herbert continued very ill, though the sharpness of his attack had subsided into a nervous irritable debility. His one great anxiety appeared to be the safety of a small portfolio which he kept constantly under his pillow or about his

person; manifesting remarkable uneasiness when anyone chanced to glance towards it. The eyes of Constance, which were anxiously fixed upon him, seemed particularly to importune him. He expressed the most nervous impatience to remove to the Chauntry, but, besides his illness, there were affairs connected with Margaret's Will which obliged them to remain some time in town.

Two days after the funeral, the Harrops arrived. They had found the letter that was awaiting them at home, and turned round their horses' heads, and travelled as fast as possible to reach Constance. The sight of her friend roused Constance from her apathy, and unlocked the fountain of her brain; her tears flowed without restraint, and seemed as though they would never cease.

Their idea had been to take her home

with them, but the state of her father's health rendered that impossible; and, painful as it was, it was the very best thing that could befall Constance, to have an imperative duty laid upon her, and which would absorb all the strength and judgment she possessed. She had become necessary to her father, and there was no one who could supply her place. This would do more than anything else to prevent her from being swallowed up with over-much sorrow.

However individually painful or disagreeable an imperative situation may be, no matter what amount of fatigue or annoyance it may entail, the fact that it admits of no question, effectually prevents all the *friction* which, alike in morals as machinery, is the great source of unprofitable wear and tear.

If Mrs. Harrop had needed any further

comment upon the irony of time, it was furnished during the few days she remained under the roof of Charles Herbert. Worn to a skeleton, a prey to a melancholy which seemed to possess him like an evil spirit, consuming him as by an internal fire, without the energy, he sat in gloomy helplessness, the most miserable man that could be seen. And this was he who had laid desolate so many years of her life, because she had clung obstinately to her own idea of his perfection, and refused to see what was before her eyes!

If men, and women, too, could only be strong enough to let their idols go when they loosen in their grasp, they would be spared much ashes and bitterness which now fall to their lot. Charles Herbert was not changed; the qualities that were in him then had only developed, brought forth their natural fruit, and were now run to seed!

At length Charles was pronounced well enough to travel. Old Nanny, and another servant, were despatched before to get all things in readiness. Whilst Constance and her father, attended by David, who had been Margaret's servant, followed by easy stages, and the Harrops were once more at liberty to set their faces homeward.

CHAPTER VII.

DURING Charles Herbert's last absence from England, instead of going to Vienna, he had made a voyage to America, and gone on to New Orleans, impelled by the vagrant, restless spirit which prevented him from ever finding rest in one place long together.

The thirst for gold had gained upon him greatly within the last few years. It had ceased to be the desire to leave Constance independent at his death, it had become a love of money for its own sake, combined with a morbid dread of coming to poverty!

He had got a fixed idea that he should die in a workhouse, and he had become penurious in his habits, dirty and sordid in his person. Gambling was the only means in which he had any faith for getting money, and it was, besides, the ruling passion of his life—the only point of vitality that still remained in activity. If this had become feeble, he would, in all probability, have sunk down into a *chiffonnier*, and found at once his solace and employment in scraping together all the rags, and bones, and rubbish that could be found by diligent search.

In New Orleans his talents for gambling found ample scope: his reckless stakes and deep play, combined with the penuriousness of his dress and mode of life, excited attention, and he enjoyed the mysterious reverence which is shown to a miser—a man whose wealth is always measured by the deplorableness of his appearance.

It was a strange idiosyncrasy; the reality of the privations he imposed on himself he did not feel; but the dread of having to endure them from necessity was a corroding thought that deprived him of rest, though it was highly improbable that any misfortune would reduce him to hardships greater than those he voluntarily accepted. Gambling was the imaginative point in his life, the only outlet from the dirty, sordid realities with which he surrounded himself.

One night, in a gambling-house, his acquaintance was challenged by an Englishman of singularly unprepossessing aspect—a hard, clumsy-looking man, who seemed to have been cut into shape by cunning and impudence. He had with him two companions of the same stamp, but more underbred than himself. He proved to be Mr. Maryland, the son of old Maryland by his first marriage.

Charles had not seen his wife's stepson more than three times in his life; since his marriage all intercourse had ceased, and he was not at all pleased at this attempt to renew it. But gambling brings a man acquainted with strange company, and blunts all fastidiousness. Charles lived in a mean lodging, and they lived at a first-rate hotel; nevertheless, a certain amount of intimacy sprang up between them. Mr. Maryland had apparently his own reasons for cultivating Charles Herbert's acquaintance; he courted him in every possible way, and published the connexion there was between them wherever he went. He spread reports of Charles's wealth and station at home, his ancient family and high standing, until Charles was looked upon as a personage, by those in his own meridian, who believed him to be all the British aristocracy rolled into his one person.

Charles did not dislike the consideration he enjoyed, and did not deny any of the honours that were imputed to him, further than by declaring that he was a poor man, who would come to die in a hospital; which was of course treated as the pleasant jest of a rich man.

They remained in New Orleans some time, during which Charles Herbert had played with various success, but his winnings were not so considerable as he had expected. He had lost chiefly to Maryland and his companions on the day they invited him to dinner at their rooms in the hotel. After dinner they offered him his revenge.

The sitting was prolonged through the whole night, until late in the following day. Charles Herbert rose at length the winner of a considerable sum, which was handed over to him chiefly in English notes, and partly in gold. One of the party then pro-

duced a quantity of jewellery, which he declared he had won on shipboard.

During his residence in India, Charles Herbert had become skilled in the value of precious stones, and he saw at once that those before him were of fine quality, a set of diamonds and sapphires, in particular, which were worth a prince's ransom.

The man who possessed them seemed entirely ignorant of their value, and offered either to play for them, or to sell them for a sum so trifling that Charles eagerly clinched the bargain. The man stipulated that he should receive gold, to which Charles, secure in his own judgment, readily consented.

He considered that the last twenty-four hours had been the luckiest in his life. That same day Maryland and his companions left New Orleans. Charles imagined they were going on a gambling speculation elsewhere,

and heard of their departure with indifference, or rather with a certain gladness. It delivered him from their society, which had become importunate.

Two days afterwards he took up an English newspaper, which gave a detailed account of an audacious bank robbery, and the abstraction of a quantity of valuable jewellery, which had been lodged in the bank as security for a loan.

A cold perspiration broke out upon Charles as the horrible idea flashed upon him that *he* might be in possession of this stolen property! It was but too true! The numbers of the notes he had received corresponded, and of the jewellery being that which had been stolen there could be no doubt.

The horror of his position rose vividly before him. He had been the companion of these men; he had been seen publicly as

their associate. Maryland was known to be connected with him. As to the jewellery, he had bought it for so much below its value, that he could not entertain a hope of persuading any jury that he had become possessed of it even in a *quasi*-honest manner. The confederates had no doubt disposed of other portions of the property in the city, in which case his position was terrible. They were safe, gone he knew not whither; whilst he remained to bear the brunt of any evil chance that might ensue!

All moral courage and energy had gradually rusted out of him; but there remained a morbid dread of anything which should cause *éclat* or scandal. He did not dare to take the only rational course that remained for him, and by a voluntary communication forestal all awkward discoveries. His only idea was to get back to England and "consult Marchmont," who exercised

over him the authority of a strong mind, combined with the despotic influence of a creditor.

He accordingly sought out a vessel that was on the point of sailing for England. He would gladly, even in that moment of extremity, have économised on the passage-money, and taken a steerage berth; but he did not dare, and with a pang of bitter reluctance he secured a cabin to himself and his ill-got wealth. It was not until they were under weigh that he could breathe freely. Up to the last instant he had "heard a voice in every wind," and seen an officer of justice in every beggar in the street.

Once safe in his own cabin, he secured the door, and proceeded to inspect the jewels, which he had not dared to look upon since the day of his fatal discovery; but now he untied the leathern bag that con-

tained them, and they gleamed before his eyes in all their beauty. He felt a pang at the idea that he must give them up. The pure water of the diamonds, the mysterious gleam of the sapphires, entered his heart like poison. The thought of having to resign them was even worse than the fear that had haunted him of having them discovered in his possession.

Whilst he was thus gazing, the dinner-bell rang, and, hastily securing the jewels, he joined the other passengers at table.

By the chance which always seems to play with loaded dice, an old gentleman near him began to talk about the great bank robbery, and to speculate on the probability of the thieves coming to America. He told several wonderful stories of the fatality by which those who had committed a crime were induced to take precisely the course which was to denounce them,

supporting the theory he held that criminals always afforded the clue to their own detection.

Charles Herbert did not feel particularly comfortable under this discourse, which merged into an argument about circumstantial evidence, and the innocent men who had fallen victims to it. He made his escape as soon as possible, feeling as though the eyes of all present were fixed upon him in a strangely inquisitive fashion.

He returned to his dangerous treasures;—the crisp, glossy bank-notes, the dazzling beauty of the jewels, had witchcraft in them. He persuaded himself that there was less risk in keeping them than in giving information about them. He tried to persuade himself that he was their lawful owner. He had *paid* for the jewels—he had *won* the money; it would be so much positive loss to himself if the property were

given up to those from whom it had been previously plundered; and why was he, an honest man, to bear the injury? Why was he to be stripped that others might have restitution?

Then, there was the dreadful chance that his story might not be believed. The horror of being questioned—suspected; the scandalous *éclat* which would unavoidably ensue in any case; and the very shady sort of credit that, under the most favourable circumstances, could accrue to him if the real truth were all known and believed.

The more he thought of it, the worse the story seemed to tell against himself. Then he thought of Constance, and the shock it would be to her to discover that her father was a gambler, and the companion of thieves. He recollected at that moment, as if the devil had whispered it into his ear, that Mr. Marchmont, who was so hard and

had, under the plea of indisposition, confined himself to his cabin. He now thought it necessary to mix with the other passengers, "lest he might excite suspicion."

"You are quite a hermit, Mr. Herbert," said the old gentleman whose discourse on the first day of their going to sea had so sorely discomposed him, and who was now taking a constitutional walk up and down the deck, enjoying the fresh breeze. Charles Herbert started at being thus addressed, and trying not to look guilty, he said something about sea-sickness. The old gentleman chuckled. "Ah, you should do as I do, and have a bucket of salt-water dashed over you every morning when you leave your berth. Keep a sound mind in a sound body, and sea-sickness, or sickness of any sort, would keep its distance."

This old gentleman, with his white hair, rosy port-wine looking cheeks, and grey

twinkling eyes, seemed, to the morbid fancy of Charles, transformed into a detective in disguise, surreptitiously endeavouring to find out what he did in his cabin.

"I always think that if people would be good and contented they might always be happy, and so I tell my young folks. Come, Mr. Herbert, what say you to a hit of backgammon till dinner time,—sixpence a game?"

Charles Herbert fancied a snare in this innocent proposal.

"Thank you," said he, hurriedly, "but I do not play; I never gamble."

"Why, bless the king! who ever dreamed of gambling? There is no harm in an innocent game of backgammon," rejoined the old man, testily.

"Is it Mr. Herbert talking against gambling?" said a passenger, who stood near; "that would be Satan reproving sin,

with a witness; why, he made quite a sensation in the billiard rooms, and his luck at *lansquenet* was something marvellous, as I know to my cost. By the way, are those friends of yours gone to Cuba, as they intended?"

"They were no friends of mine. My acquaintance with them was casual; they did not tell me of their movements," said Charles, haughtily.

"I thought one of the fellows, Maryland, he called himself, said he was your relation?"

"It is an honour I should be sorry to claim; but he is no relation at all."

"Ah, well, now that is curious; they seemed great companions of yours when I saw them along with you."

Charles looked and felt annoyed, but the gong sounded for dinner, and in the bustle that ensued the conversation naturally ceased.

That evening, as Charles was smoking over the side of the vessel, the same passenger came up to him, and said, with an air of confidence, "You seemed vexed this morning, but I don't mind telling you a bit of a secret. The companion of that fellow, Maryland, paid me my winnings one night in a note that is advertised amongst those in the bank robbery. Maybe the same thing happened to you, and I thought I would just consult you. He might have taken it through ill luck, as I did; but still, it is an awkward thing to have stolen property traced to one."

"If it were my case, I should give information to the police as soon as we reached England," replied Charles, coolly flinging away the end of his cigar.

"Maybe so," replied the other. "But it would be a deuced bore to lose so much money."

He looked cunningly and inquiringly at Charles, who would gladly have given twice ten pounds to have obtained possession of the note in question. This incident was not calculated to compose his nerves; but, after all, it was only a fraction of the stolen property, and he could do nothing; it was another item in the risk that he must run. He held aloof from all his companions during the remainder of the voyage.

The shock that awaited him on his arrival in London, acting upon the highly excited state of his nerves, produced a crisis that might easily have proved fatal. That it did not, was perhaps to be regretted for his own sake, and that of all connected with him.

Arrived at the Chauntry, he shut himself in his own room, and for the last time feasted his eyes on the fatal beauty of the jewels. He loved them better for all the danger and

disgrace he incurred for them. The fashion of their setting was rich and fanciful; evidently unique; designed no doubt as some love-token, it was not probable there would be other sets like them to give the aspect of a coincidence to his possession.

He was rapidly becoming insane on the point of hiding them, and developed all the elaborate cunning of madness. He took them out of their setting and secured them in a bag of Chamois leather, stitching each stone separately, which was a work of some time; he then broke up, in small pieces, the gold and silver settings, which he melted as well as he could in an old glue-pot over the fire, until all trace of their fashion was defaced.

But difficulties arose to his imagination at every turn, and the amount of cunning and diplomacy he employed to obtain a fire in his room without, as he imagined, excit-

ing suspicion, would have sufficed for a State conspiracy.

The precautions with which he encumbered his endeavours to obtain the means of raising the flag beneath the grate in his dressing-room, employed him for three weeks; and every step he took seemed to his morbid and exaggerated fancy so many palpable links in the chain of evidence which might be drawn round him.

This strain upon his nerves continued for a month. His efforts to guard against suspicion literally paralyzed his power to move, and for whole days together he was the prey of the most pitiable indecision. He often lay awake half the night, debating whether it would best elude suspicion if he were to come downstairs to breakfast, or have it brought up to his bedside. The door of his dressing-room he easily kept locked, but he fancied that everybody

who entered the room looked at it inquisitively.

At last the money, and the jewels, and the melted mass of the settings were safely buried beneath the hearth-stone of the dressing-room, and he breathed freely once more. Though what particular or general benefit he could derive from the possession of a treasure he was obliged to hide from the light of day, and dare neither use nor look upon, it would be hard for any one but a miser or a madman to say.

In less than a week, however, the fatal idea struck him that the housemaid might be tempted by the devil to raise up the stone which he had laid down with so much labour. He had used about ten times more mortar than a professional workman would have employed, and it hardened very slowly.

The moment this idea seized him, he

brought workmen to the Chauntry, under pretext of alterations, and had the windows of the dressing-room bricked up, and with his own hands he securely nailed up the door, as he fondly hoped, upon his secret for ever, and had a massive book-case placed before it.

CHAPTER IX.

CONSTANCE had been too much taken up with her own grief to pay much attention to her father's proceedings during the first few weeks of their return to the Chauntry. Every object that met her eye was associated with her who was gone. Margaret's presence still seemed to linger in every room; every article of furniture, every plant and flower in the garden, bore the impress of her arrangement; all things were as they had been,—the same to all appearance,—but the difference to Constance!

The sight of the ordinary articles of clothes or furniture which were in daily use by those who have been taken away from us by death, is a most painful aggravation of sorrow, to see these fragile, perishable things surviving them, is at first a bitter aggravation. It is not until time has passed over us that they become memorials of a precious past that cannot be changed or reversed.

The first excitement of grief had passed away; there was no longer any call upon her for exertion, and Constance felt that life lay upon her with a weight heavy as lead. Neither hope nor object was to be seen which could vary the dull monotony of the solitude that stretched before her. Life looked very dreary from the point she had reached.

But she was not to remain long without some active sources of annoyance.

No sooner had Charles finished hiding his secret, than he began to feel the irksomeness of stopping at home to guard it. A rambling life had become so completely his ordinary mode of existence, that the necessity, whether real or imaginary, of remaining in one spot was intolerable. When the master of the house is ill at ease, there is always scant peace and comfort for every other member of the household. Charles could find no outlet for his restlessness out of doors in the active management of his estate, for Mr. Marchmont had appointed his own agent and his own plans, with which Charles did not dare to interfere.

There had been great changes in the neighbourhood; a new generation had grown up, and Charles felt little inclination to gather up the dropped threads of old acquaintanceships, or to weave the web of

new ones. He had become moody, suspicious, and hypochondriacal,—seldom leaving the house except for a short ride or a desultory stroll through the fields, clad in an old drab-coloured dressing-gown and a black silk cap, now old and greasy, with his hair allowed to grow wild, and his beard untrimmed for days together.

The habit of living in dressing-gown and slippers cannot be called a vice; and yet it has a very demoralizing effect upon the man who gives in to it. A general loosening of all energy and promptness follows upon it. There is much significance lying in the Apostle's injunction to "stand, therefore, having our loins girded."

Charles did not, however, sink into vacuity. The constraint and *ennui* of his life found an outlet in worrying about the housekeeping, and in incessant endeavours

to introduce a sordid, pinching economy. He tormented Constance with reproaches about her extravagance, which would bring him to the workhouse. He would go into the kitchen half a dozen times in the day to screw the fire into a narrower compass, and upbraid old Nanny with her reckless disregard of the value of fuel. Nanny, who had never in her life been subjected to the interference of master or mistress, was furious at this new phase of things. Spend-thrifts are always the most unmerciful of economists; but, indeed, most people carry out their virtues at the expense of their neighbours.

Margaret's household had always been carried on with a certain elegant thrift, an order and regularity that were, like the light of day, matters of course, but noiseless and beautiful. Constance had fallen into the same habits all unconsciously, and

she had ruled her own house at Royton with as much discretion as if she had been the wise woman described by King Solomon. Now, however, she found herself suddenly superseded and treated as a child; chided, thwarted, and contradicted; her judgment and authority set entirely aside.

Charles insisted upon regulating everything—from the number of potatoes that were given out for dinner, to the scouring of a floor or the burning of a candle—nothing was too minute to escape his worrying inquiries. Constance was far too sad and miserable to offer any opposition; she yielded passively, endeavouring to take refuge within narrower limits, where she might be free to indulge her own habits of occupation, and exerted herself to comfort and pacify old Nanny, whose disgust and indignation knew no bounds; but she soon found herself dragged out of her own

privacy and leisure to live under her father's eye.

When he was in the house, he never allowed her to leave his presence if he could help it, and yet her society did not appear to afford him pleasure. If she tried to converse, he complained of her chattering; if she remained silent, he said she was sullen. He suspected her, not of anything in particular, but he was in a state of chronic suspiciousness against the world in general. Whatever he did not entirely comprehend, he imagined might be turned to ill; and he could not endure that Constance should possess any personal mode of life that did not pass under his own eye.

The weather set in cold and stormy remarkably early this year, and under the plea of saving fuel, he had Margaret's pleasant sitting-room shut up, which obliged Constance to inhabit the gloomy dining-

parlour, which only commanded a corner of the Nun's Walk, and an old wall covered with ivy. Here she was obliged to sit all the day. At first she tried to follow her usual employments, but he could not endure to see her either reading or writing, for no better reason than that they took up her attention.

If ever she endeavoured to take refuge in her own bed-room, he always crept stealthily after her, to spy where she was, and to call her down. This partly arose from a nervous fear lest she should enter his room, but chiefly from a childish dislike to being left by himself, and partly from the infirm restlessness that gained upon him from its indulgence.

Constance endeavoured, by retiring early to rest, to secure a few hours of peace and freedom; but he defeated this, by allowing her only a short end of rush-

light, and calling at the end of a quarter of an hour to know if her candle were extinguished, giving her no respite from his knocking and calling until he saw the light disappear from under her door. His bed-room was opposite to hers, and he arose frequently in the course of the night to ascertain whether she had obtained any surreptitious candles.

She made one last attempt to obtain an hour to herself by getting up early; but rise when she would, her father, whose faculties seemed to be preternaturally sharpened, always divined her purpose, and defeated it by rising himself.

This systematic mode of tormenting was dreadfully irksome to Constance, but she looked upon it in the only light that could render it tolerable,—as a disease, as a mental infirmity which she was bound to meet with patience and gentleness. Any attempt

to assert herself, or to carry out her own personal inclinations, would only have induced altercation, and have increased his irritability to a degree at once injurious and painful.

She recollected the words of her aunt, spoken years ago, with regard to the duty she would have to undertake towards her father; and it was well for her that she could recognise it now that it had arrived, for our duties do not come to us packed and labelled. We have to discover them through all the confusion and apparent injustice and unreasonableness with which they are often invested.

That Constance was thus able to yield her own will, instead of struggling for it, saved her from much bitter and useless annoyance.

She was anxious to know how things went on at Royton, but her father could

not endure to hear the place named, and she was obliged to content herself with thinking about it as she sat over her needlework, the only employment her father would tolerate; and she consoled herself with the hope that she might pay a visit there in the spring.

From time to time she received letters from Mrs. Harrop. But, alas and alas for human nature! Mrs. Harrop was very happy and very busy, dreadfully pre-occupied with her husband, her household, the farm, and her schools; and though she loved Constance as dearly as ever, still these things lay on the surface of her daily life, and occupied all the material time of every day: Constance was not mixed up with them, and could only feel sympathy and interest in them at a distance. There was no fault in this, for one of the limitations of human nature is that it

can only be in one place at a time; and its horizon, as far as it can see, even with the best of telescopes, is very limited indeed.

Mrs. Harrop's letters were the only little bits of brightness that came to Constance from without; still she could not help feeling the difference between these cordial, cheering letters, coming from a woman placed in the midst of active duties depending upon her for their fulfilment, and that sweet intoxicating sympathy, "the wine of life," distilled from the exclusive affection of a heart at leisure and a life unoccupied by other claims.

Still it was, beyond all doubt, a far better state of things for Mrs. Harrop, and not altogether worse for Constance. It was expedient that she should gain strength to lead her own life without the stimulus of emotion. Our friends may lift us up when we stumble, and support us over the dark and

rugged passes in our pilgrimage; but none, not the truest lover or most devoted friend, may carry another through life. We must each walk on alone, and bear our own burden.

But dreary as the life of Constance seemed to outward appearance, she was not unhappy. She had the undoubting conviction that she was in her right place, and doing precisely the work that it was necessary she should do—the work incumbent upon her, and which could not be delegated to another; and no work of clearly recognised duty is so wearying as the “unchartered freedom” to please ourselves. The obligation of duty is the law of spiritual gravity which keeps our life coherent.

Constance was, however, only nineteen; and this revered sense of duty, although the ruling principle of her life, and growing in strength and clearness every day, still, as yet,

it worked within her half-unconsciously, and was not so far developed as to make her independent of human motives; and, in truth, a human motive was far the most distinct and articulate in her own heart. The human motive that gave a sweet ideality to the weary dulness of her material life was the thought of Phillip.

Of course she had taken to herself the blame of all that had been done or said ungenerous or cruel at their last interview, and had long since come to regard him with the deep pity and admiration due to a true-hearted and unfortunate lover. She could not turn back from her own course—she might not marry him—that was a matter of destiny from which there was no appeal; but love him she might, and love him she did, with all the idolatry of a first passion, which sees neither beginning of time nor end of days, but believes devoutly in its own

eternity. She worshipped him, she idealized him; and it is quite needless to say that the Phillip Marchmont of her imagination bore not the slightest trace of resemblance to the Mr. Phillip Marchmont of actual life.

Her whole aim was to make herself worthy of him—her one idea to become what Phillip would approve. This thought carried her through the hours of durance she had to pass in the dull and only half-warmed parlour during the months of that dreary winter.

She built bright castles in the air of how, when Phillip was married—an event she had brought herself to look upon with pleasure—she would become the friend of his wife. Phillip was to bring her, and to present her to Constance with words of noble and loyal affection, claiming her for a friend and sister to them both. Constance felt her heart beat warmly to this appeal,

and she thought how much dearer than any sister Phillip's wife would be.

She pictured her full of sweet, womanly tenderness, who would recognise in her present happiness the fruit of another's self-renunciation, and endeavour, by her love and sympathy, to compensate to her for what she had given up; and how Phillip would stand beside them, rejoicing in this perfect friendship and sisterhood between the two women he loved best in the world.

It must be observed, that although Constance was quite willing that Phillip should love his wife, and be quite happy and contented with her, yet she still asserted her consciousness of having once held the first place with him, which she had resigned, but from which she had never been deposed; and there was a subtle, unacknowledged hope that, although Phillip might love

another, it was not to be *quite* so much as he would have loved Constance could he have obtained her.

Then she continued the romance, and pictured them surrounded by their children. She endowed them all with beauty and good gifts, like a fairy god-mother. She settled that one should be named after her, and that she would adopt it, and that it should be allowed to live with her altogether. To make amends for this, be it said, she had bestowed upon them a patriarchal number of children, in order that they might spare one without being unnatural.

Then she imagined herself becoming an old lady, and this adopted daughter grown up a beautiful young creature, sought in marriage by a young nobleman every way worthy of her; and then she would endow her with Royton Hall for a wedding

present, and go to live with them, and bring up their children, and die at last a beloved old grandmamma!

This was the romance spun out with bright shining sunbeams, day after day, with which Constance enlivened the gloomy discomfort of those winter months. Such was her outer life—such was her inner life; and so time passed on until the fifth of May, when one morning the postman brought a letter for which he demanded double postage.

CHAPTER X.

THE eyes of Constance were anxiously fixed upon her father, as he read through this letter; her heart beat so strongly that it might have almost been heard.

He gave it to her across the table, saying, "This is news, indeed." He looked at her with a kind of pity, and there was a gentle inflection in the tone of his voice, that at any other time would have struck her; as it was, however, all her attention was engrossed by the letter.

It was written in a style of expansive-

ness very different from the dry brevity of Mr. Marchmont's usual communications, and announced the singular satisfaction he felt in being able to communicate the marriage of his son Phillip with the young and beautiful Miss Ainslie. He went off into a long genealogical digression upon her family and antecedents. The main fact appeared to be, that her father had been the son of Sir Jonas Sefton, of Launston Hall, in Kent; but he was dead, and her mother, left with three daughters, had brought them up in the greatest elegance and gentility. One of the sisters was married to a rich colonel in India. None of them appeared to have much money, but were moving, according to his account, in the best society. Miss Ainslie had been much sought after, had received distinguished offers of marriage, but had refused them all for the sake of Phillip. There had been much opposi-

tion at first, on the part of her own family, who looked higher for her, but the mother at length had yielded to the united entreaties of the young people, &c. &c.

Then followed an account of the amiable condescension of her uncle, the Baronet, who, unable to be present at the ceremony, sent the bride an elegant silver inkstand, and an invitation to visit him at Launston Hall.

Mr. Marchmont's satisfaction and pride in this connexion were evidently genuine, but it was only an introduction to the real gist of the letter. He could not so far forget his natural instinct for business as not in some way to bring in his own interest.

There was a postscript, in which he announced that he proposed running down to the Chauntry for a few days at the beginning of the week, as he wished to consult Charles upon a certain affair of im-

portance. Also, he added, that if quite agreeable to Miss Constance, Phillip and his bride would spend a couple of days with her on their way to Launston Hall.

The marriage of Phillip had been the foundation of all her day-dreams for many months, and yet, now that it was come to pass, her heart contracted with a pang. It was a hard, sharp reality that she could no longer invest with romance; she had loved Phillip's wife dearly in her imagination, but she felt an instinctive antipathy to the "young and beautiful Miss Ainslie" of flesh and blood. The sudden announcement of his marriage revealed to her how much she had cherished the idea that she still held the first place in his heart. All these emotions resolved themselves into a flood of bitter tears, to conceal which she hastily retired to her own room.

Her father allowed her to remain there in peace for at least a quarter of an hour; he felt very sorry for her, and began, as usual, to reflect upon the evil fate that had pursued him from his youth up, in the course of which he forgot all about Constance, who indeed seemed to him only one more item in the cruelty with which destiny had uniformly treated *him*.

His thoughts gradually reverted to present matters—to the extreme annoyance of having to receive visitors—the ruinous expense it would be to feed and lodge so many persons; also, he did not like the thought of seeing Mr. Marchmont, from whom, however, he determined strictly to conceal his secret, if he could. Mr. Marchmont, as he knew from experience, had a mesmeric power of attracting secrets, and making the person he was conversing with reveal them in spite of himself. He then

began to wonder what could keep Constance so long; and falling readily back into his long-indulged habit of worrying, he called her, and as she did not answer, he went upstairs to knock at her door, and desire her to come down directly.

Poor Constance stopped crying as quickly as she could, bathed her face, and after waiting a few moments in the hope that the traces of her tears would grow fainter, complied at last with the reiterated calls that were made for her.

“Really, Constance, I cannot think why you shut yourself up in your own room so constantly, especially when there is so much to advise about. I am sure I do not know how we are to afford to entertain so many people at rack and manger. It will be a terrible expense.”

“Oh, no, papa; aunt Margaret never used to make any difficulty when you and Mr.

Marchmont used to come down to stay here. I think it is very friendly of Phillip to bring his wife to see us. It will be a pleasant change for you."

"We cannot afford to entertain fine company, child; we must be frugal, very frugal."

"We will be as frugal as you please when they are gone again, but we must not disgrace our hospitality; and as it is a thing that must be gone through with, it will be the best for Nanny and me to undertake the management, and order things as my aunt used to do. The extra expense I will defray myself."

Constance looked and spoke with a quiet decision that took an immediate effect on Charles which at once pained and surprised her. Instead of offering any opposition, he drew back like a rebuked child, and began whimpering that she should be so cross, and declaring that they would both come

to the workhouse. But from that moment he evidently clung to her, as the one that was to stand between him and all the harm there might come to pass from the dreaded visitors. Nanny and Constance were allowed to settle everything as they chose.

As the day for Mr. Marchmont's arrival came on, Charles Herbert's nervous dread increased. He could not bear Constance out of his sight, and he seemed to feel no safety except in her presence.

At length Mr. Marchmont arrived. It was three days before Phillip and his wife were expected.

The change in Mr. Marchmont's aspect was something remarkable. His face, for once in his life, wore a natural expression; a broad, irrepressible smile of complacent satisfaction lighted up his stony black eyes. It was not a very noble or generous expression, but it was, for once,

the genuine reflex of what was occupying his mind—which was, the pride and satisfaction of having succeeded in allying himself to a really good family. The secret vanity of his whole life had been crowned with success, and he made no attempt to conceal his feelings, which in itself was quite a novel sensation.

Before he had been an hour in the house, he had given them a full description of the marriage. There were no less than twenty carriages, all the coachmen and footmen in their full-dress livery, with enormous bouquets and wedding favours. There was quite a crowd round the house to see the bride return from church.

“Is she handsome?” asked Constance, at the first pause in his discourse.

“Handsome? She is lovely! and the most elegant-mannered young lady I ever saw! Her mother, too, is quite a lady of

[illegible]

The first thing I noticed when
 I stepped out of the car was
 the cold. It was a sharp
 contrast to the heat of the
 car. I shivered as I walked
 towards the building. The
 air was crisp and clean.
 I took a deep breath and
 felt a sense of relief.
 The building was old and
 grand. It had a high
 ceiling and large windows.
 I walked through the
 lobby and saw many people.
 Some were sitting at tables
 and others were standing.
 I felt a bit out of place.
 I looked around and saw
 a man in a suit. He was
 talking to a woman. I
 walked over to them and
 introduced myself. They
 were friendly and showed
 me to my room. The room
 was nice and comfortable.
 I took a shower and
 got ready for bed. I
 fell asleep quickly. The
 next morning I woke up
 early. I got dressed and
 went to the breakfast
 room. I ate my meal and
 talked to the people there.
 I had a good time. I
 was glad to be there.
 I went back to my room
 and packed my things.
 I said goodbye to the
 people and got into the
 car. I drove home and
 thought about the trip.
 It was a great experience.
 I will never forget it.

detail of bridal splendour, from the magnificent wedding-cake, which weighed upwards of sixty pounds, to the names and titles of the most distinguished guests, always returning to the crowning glory of "the twenty private carriages," with their complement of coachmen and footmen.

Constance listened to all these details with a curiosity strangely mingled with contempt. She tried to think that it was only Mr. Marchmont who was a vulgar, vain man. But it was all so different from everything that she had imagined for Phillip; all her dreams were driven away by this display of sugar and silver favours. She did not know what to think. Sad and oppressed, unable to call up a single scene of the romance that had so long occupied her thoughts, she lay down that night with the feelings that might be supposed of one who, having lived in fairy-land, is suddenly

disenchanted, and finds himself lying amongst the withered leaves and fallen boughs of a lonely forest. However, when she awoke the next morning, she set about finishing the arrangement of the rooms, which had been so long disused, and giving to them their old accustomed air of comfort.

It was with a certain magnanimity that she busied herself in carrying all that was best in the house to decorate the rooms set apart for the expected visitors. Her aunt's dressing-glass, with its frame of carved ivory; the japan dressing-box; the Indian screen, and the toilet cover of delicate embroidery. Out of her own room, she brought her ebony chair and crimson cushion, and a large, old Dresden vase, which she filled with whatever flowers and green leaves she could gather out of the garden; but the season was backward, and there was very little to gather.

Charles had refused to have any money spent upon the garden. One of his great economies had been at the expense of the flower-garden. Constance availed herself of her new-found authority to have it put in some sort of order. She recollected the first day she had seen Phillip, and the disdain with which he had regarded everything he saw. At the time it had captivated her, as a mark of his superiority; but now, strangely enough, this was the one point in all the past that stood out in her memory.

As her task proceeded, she recollected his fastidiousness and contempt for whatever was not costly and the best of its kind; and she looked round upon the faded carpets, and somewhat scanty curtains belonging to an old-world style of housekeeping; but the oak floors and staircase were polished like jet; everything was bright, and clean to

perfection, and there was nothing obtrusive or out of keeping with the house itself.

But Constance thought of the elegant young bride, and of all the modern environments which Phillip so much appreciated; she looked upon the result of her labours and sighed; she felt,—but she would not own to herself what she felt; she stifled it down, and went to help old Nanny in the kitchen with the pastry and cheesecakes, and other articles of fine cooking, which would be required.

Meanwhile, Mr. Marchmont had been out inspecting the farm. Charles accompanied him with an obsequious attention, intended to conciliate him; for, alas! he was more than ever in his power; and by an agreement for money that had been advanced from time to time, over and above the stipulated income, Mr. Marchmont had secured to himself the power to take pos-

session of the Chauntry whenever he pleased, at a moment's notice; and to Charles it had now become a matter of vital importance to be allowed to remain. Mr. Marchmont had always said that he would never make use of his power to eject him; but this marriage of his son with a fashionable young lady had materially altered his plans. His son was no longer hoping to marry Constance, or to be dependent upon her in any way for his introduction to the neighbourhood; he had made what seemed to be a brilliant match, and must be enabled to shine worthily beside it.

Mr. Marchmont, when the settlements were being debated, had spoken of "The Chauntry lands" as an estate he should settle upon his future daughter-in-law and her children. To Mrs. Ainslie and her family he carelessly mentioned Charles

Herbert as his friend, who lived there at present, the estate having once been in the possession of his family; leaving it to be understood that he referred to a point of remote antiquity.

The young bride, Mrs. Phillip Marchmont, when the visit to the Chauntry was arranged, was fully impressed with the idea that she was going to visit her own dower house, and prepared to be sweetly affable in her manners; but regarded both Charles and Constance as persons far beneath her in the social scale, and whom she was going to honour by spending two days beneath their roof.

Phillip retained a sullen, smouldering resentment against Constance, and enjoyed the thought of showing her the brilliant match he had secured. He felt heartily glad she had left him free, and did not in the least regret her; but he was not the

less outraged in his self-love that she should have been able to refuse him twice; nor had he ever cordially forgiven his father for requiring him to make the last attempt.

His bride ran no risk of offending him by her display of affable impertinence towards Constance. He confided to her one day that Constance had been much in love with him, they having been brought up a good deal together; and that, moved chiefly by compassion, he had made her an offer, which she was quite willing to accept; but his father had interfered to break off the match, from not liking the connexion, there being decided insanity in the family, besides other objections.

Phillip's heart smote him for saying this when he saw the malicious, eager, cold-hearted curiosity with which his elegant lady pursued the subject; on the day

appointed for them to arrive at the Chauntry, he would willingly have avoided the visit if he could, but it was too late; and he could only caution his wife as they went along, not to allow Constance to perceive she was aware of what had passed.

"Of course not, my dear Phillip," said she, putting on her French gloves. "I would not be so *gauche* for the world; but I confess I am curious to see with what countenance she will receive you. Poor little thing! I hope she will not be too much overcome; it will be a trial to her, no doubt."

Mrs. Phillip Marchmont spoke with smiling self-sufficiency, and in a thin little voice, which would have been shrill had it not been carefully modulated by governesses and elocution masters, and the hardness of its *timbre* disguised by the infantine tone to which she had been taught to pitch

it. Her words fell from the tip of her lips, and she had a little laugh, which she had been told was captivating and sweet; but to dispassionate hearers it narrowly escaped being a giggle.

"You do not think there is any danger that she will poison me, do you?" she asked, a moment afterwards, with affected alarm. "Those mad people are never safe. I am dreadfully afraid of anything like insanity."

"My dear Henrietta, you are under a mistake. I never said that Constance—Miss Herbert—was mad. I told you that insanity was in the family, which is quite a different thing. You will find Miss Herbert a superior and highly cultivated young woman."

Phillip spoke as he felt—annoyed. His wife looked at him with her inquisitive grey eyes, and then falling back in the corner of

the chaise, she said, with an appearance of pique,—

“Ah! I see how it is. You have been more in love with her than you will own, and you are already making comparisons between us.”

“And do you not think the comparison must be in your own favour?” replied he, kissing the tips of her straw-coloured gloves with great gallantry. “I assure you I never felt so proud in my life as I am at the thought of presenting you to her.”

“I do not see that her dislike or approval signifies to me in the least,” replied the fair bride, with some disdain; “indeed, any expression of her opinion can only be regarded as impertinent.”

Phillip dropped the subject. One of his father’s maxims was, “Never contend with women,” and he instinctively adopted it.

Shortly afterwards, the chaise turned down the lane that led to the Chauntry.

"Is it not a quaint old place?" said Phillip, somewhat anxious to ascertain its effect on his bride.

"Yes; but I expected something more baronial, more like Haddon."

Any other time she would have declared it charming, but her amiability had been somewhat acidulated.

CHAPTER XI.

CHARLES HERBERT, Mr. Marchmont, and Constance, were all waiting in the porch to welcome the new comers. The eyes of the two women naturally sought each other. Constance, in her black dress, without a particle of ornament, except the narrow cambric ruff, which was scarcely whiter than the fair, flexible neck it encircled, looked so gracefully noble that Mrs. Phillip Marchmont felt a pang of envy, which was the homage of instinct to her superiority. The moment afterwards came the reassuring

consciousness of her own elegance, and the conviction that she must appear a very fine lady beside this young woman in the provinces.

Constance embraced her guest with a warmth that was meant to convey all the thoughts that had been occupying her heart, but her emotion would not allow her to speak. She looked at the woman who was in the possession of the happy destiny that might have been hers, with an intense sympathy. At the first glance she thought her as lovely as an angel, and all the elaborate elegance of her toilet seemed in accordance with the *mignonne* prettiness of her style. Her face was small and childlike, with dazzling little teeth, and thin coral lips that were parted in a never-ending smile. A profusion of light golden ringlets fell down beneath her bonnet, and she had the complexion of a beautiful wax doll.

A dispassionate observer might have seen at a glance that she was a great fool, and discerned traces of an obstinate temper underneath all the smiles and dimples that played round her mouth. Her bright grey eyes, too, had a gleam of maliciousness. But Constance was not dispassionate. She had made a romance about Phillip's bride, and was engrossed by her own ideas. She turned from his wife to Phillip, and gave him her hand with frank and noble cordiality, saying, "You are very good to bring her to see us so soon."

The grasp of her hand was full of the friendliest welcome, if Phillip could have read it, but Phillip could only feel awkward and embarrassed; he did not know what to say. Charles Herbert had thrown off his dressing-gown, and attired himself with care for the occasion, and Mrs. Phillip was

agreeably surprised to find so fine a gentleman waiting to receive her.

As to Mr. Marchmont, he kissed her with an ostentation of fatherly affection, and made minute inquiries about the journey, all which the young lady received with the pretty *minauderies* of a spoiled child.

She made Phillip carry her dressing-case, and gave emphatic injunctions to her maid to see that nothing was left in the chaise; then, gathering up the skirt of her delicate silk dress, and daintily holding her embroidered handkerchief and vinaigrette, she at length tripped up the old stone steps with an air that she intended should be irresistibly fascinating to the three gentlemen.

As they were crossing the hall, she turned to Constance, with the air of one who is politely addressing another person's *femme de chambre*, and said,

"Perhaps you will be good enough to show me my room."

Constance felt surprised at the tone and the manner, but she did not comprehend the premeditated impertinence they were intended to indicate.

"Certainly, it is this way; but do not think of dressing; there is no one but ourselves, and dinner will be on the table directly. I ordered it punctually, for I know of old that Phillip does not like to wait for dinner."

"I cannot possibly sit down this figure; Dawson would be in despair. Dressing for dinner is a point mamma always insisted upon, and Phillip likes it. Will you tell him that I have requested dinner may be delayed for half-an-hour? And if you will send Dawson to me, I will make her be as expeditious as possible."

Dawson entered at this moment.

"Oh, Dawson, you are there! You must dress me like lightning. Your master is impatient for dinner."

"Can I render any assistance?" asked Constance, good-naturedly. "I hope you will feel at home, and ask for anything you want."

"Oh, thank you! I dare say we shall manage charmingly; everything looks very nice. Now, Dawson, quick! I will wear my light blue silk and blonde flounces."

The mistress and the maid became alike engrossed by the mysteries of the toilet, and did not bestow the least attention upon Constance; who, after quietly glancing round to see that nothing else was wanted, left the room.

Phillip took the announcement of the delay with the most amiable complaisance, and even declared that he should take advantage of it to make his own toilet;

for, "you see," said he, "Henrietta has always been accustomed to live in a certain style. She and her mother always dressed for dinner, even when they were alone, and two footmen always waited."

"I fear the dinner will not improve with waiting," said Constance, as the two elderly gentlemen stood yawning with *ennui* and hunger at being kept so much beyond their natural hour of dining.

"Ah! you see, Miss Constance, the aristocracy have their own way of doing everything, and a proper style of dress for every time of the day; we in the country cannot be expected to understand those niceties, but Mrs. Phillip has lived in the midst of those things all her life. But you have not told me what you think of her. Is she not a beautiful creature? I am sure you will find her a most affable and charming companion, when you come

to know more of her. A little high at first, perhaps; but that will wear off."

Before Constance could make any reply to this address, the young bride made her appearance, elegantly attired in a low sky-blue silk dress and blonde flounces, with her hair elaborated into a profusion of ringlets. She tripped up to the two gentlemen, and said, with a sweetness that exasperated Constance,—

"Ah, I have kept you from dinner, and Phillip says I am very naughty; but you will not scold me, will you?"

Charles Herbert murmured some polite speech that was inaudible; but Mr. Marchmont seemed enchanted, and kissed her hand as he presented his arm to lead her to dinner.

Phillip was preparing to take in Constance, when his wife called him off to

pick up her scarf, which she had purposely let fall.

At length they were all seated at table. Old Nanny was furious at the insult that had been offered to her dinner, which, although excellent at the beginning, had greatly deteriorated by the long delay. Constance certainly sat at the head of the table and did the honours as mistress of the house, but she was completely thrown into the shade by Mrs. Phillip, who engrossed everybody's attention by her chattering and *minauderies*, which seemed a source of perfect admiration to her husband and father-in-law.

Constance, who had shrined Phillip in her heart with so much reverence, and had led her life with the view to making it worthy of his approval, and who had considered herself, in her loving humility, as quite unequal to him, wondered how he could

tolerate so much affectation and ill-breeding ; but she had not yet got the length of blaming him.

When the two ladies retired after dinner, the young bride, having no one else to speak to, entertained Constance with the details of all the wedding splendour of which she had been the object, and described with minuteness all the articles of her wedding outfit, not omitting a single dress, or the glory of a single feather. After the cambric and the lace and the embroidery had been described, she launched out into the chapter of wedding presents, which were enumerated and embellished with all the flowers of rhetoric that could be lavished upon them. To listen to her, one might have imagined that the entire universe had no other object but to glorify Mrs. Phillip Marchmont. She rattled on for nearly an hour in this strain, when,

suddenly starting up from the sofa, she exclaimed,—

“I wish you would let me see over the house. I feel quite curious to see it. It looks such a dear, quaint old-world place; and as it is my dower house, I feel a double interest in it. I suppose you have lived here a long time?”

“But—yes! the house belongs to us. It has been in the family for many generations.”

“Ah, indeed!” replied Mrs. Phillip, with a sweet smile; “but I assure you that this house was settled upon me on my marriage by that dear old Mr. Marchmont, who is a perfect love of a father-in-law! He thinks that he cannot do enough for me. From his description, I expected to see something more imposing; but it is a charmingly quaint old place, and you keep it in excellent order. If we settle near here, I shall

often come and see how you go on. I consider you as my own tenant!"

It would be difficult to express the shock which this speech caused to Constance. The words carried conviction with them, and were a key to much that had perplexed her. She did not for a moment doubt the truth of what Mrs. Phillip said. She felt choked and suffocated, and could not reply one word. The other, perceiving her confusion, said, with an affectation of concern:—

"Dear me! I hope I have not touched upon any family mystery? Perhaps I should not have mentioned it; but I could not imagine that what was the subject of my marriage settlement could be a secret!"

"My father seldom speaks to me about business. I was not aware of the transfer," replied Constance, with as much composure as she could command. "It is natural you

should wish to see the house. Will you come now?"

In addition to her curiosity to see her "dower house," as she called it, Mrs. Phillip felt a great comfort in mortifying Constance; and there was something in the present situation that was extremely satisfactory and pleasant to her.

"I confess I should like to see the house, if you are equal to showing it; and, after all, it is perhaps as well that you should know how things really stand."

This was said with a sweet smile, and in the most innocent baby-voice: the words seemed to drop like small pearls from the tip of her lips. She rose as she spoke, and Constance, by a proud effort, commanded her trouble, and rose also. She lighted a bed-candle and preceded her guest.

They went through all the rooms except the one that had belonged to Margaret.

"What is that? why may I not enter there?" said Mrs. Phillip, in her spoiled-child way.

"That room was my aunt's," replied Constance, in a low tone.

"Oh! and I suppose you are romantic, and keep it shut up as she left it. Is there not a curious oratory, with a beautiful painted window, attached to it?"

"There is a room that was once an oratory; but it is a simple closet, with white-washed walls, and the window is very simple also."

"Phillip has told me so much about it, that he quite touched my imagination. Your aunt was a very superior woman, I have heard."

The eyes of Constance flashed, and she felt inclined to make a scornful protest; but a profound contempt, in which, however, there was no bitterness—only a perfectly

just estimate of her visitor—stopped her, and she remained silent.

They had now seen all the house, except the part occupied by the farmer and his family, and as Mrs. Phillip had pretty well gratified her impertinence, she the more readily consented to return to the sitting-room, where the gentlemen had adjourned for coffee.

CHAPTER XII.

THE remainder of the evening passed heavily enough. Mrs. Phillip sat upon the sofa and coquetted with her husband, showing off her *minauderies* for the benefit of Constance; the two elder gentlemen were playing piquet at a table apart; Constance sat silently knitting, for no one seemed to need her conversation.

At length bed-time came; and alone in her own room, Constance was at liberty to sit down amid the ruin of all her day-dreams. Phillip's wife, whom she was to

have taken to her heart as a sister, was a silly, selfish woman, about whom she could make no sort of charitable illusion. How could Phillip have been so blinded, so imposed upon, as to admire her! He could not read her character, or else surely he would have interposed to shield Constance from her petty malice.

In vain she looked back through every incident of the day; she could not find one single instance of kindness or consideration, or even an indication that he remembered the past. She wept bitterly, with a child-like sense of unhappiness, and a faith in tears that people lose as they grow older in sorrow. But blaming Phillip was not the way to grow comforted herself, and she began to take herself to task. It was she who was selfish and *exigeante*. How should Phillip understand all the petty jealousies and rivalries of women? His attention to

his wife was all right and natural; she tried to praise him for it. Then the thought crept in, that perhaps Phillip had married in pique; men always felt bitterly mortified by a refusal; and how should he know her entire and intense devotion to him? She had been cold, haughty, unlovable. If Phillip had married unhappily, it was all her fault—she had been the cause of all!

When she had reached this pitch in her meditations, and was able cordially to blame herself, she felt comforted. Phillip was still excellent—all she had ever thought him, and, in addition, was in imminent risk (as she thought) of being made very unhappy by the wife he had chosen; so much the more was there need for her to be faithful to him: he would yet need and value her friendship. She would trample down her own selfishness, and be noble and strong for his sake!

Resolutely she strove to shut her eyes to

the actual fact of things. It is only the highest stage of heroism that can admit the wedge which begins the separation between us and our cherished idols. We try to uphold them in their shrines, and cannot let them fall long after we have discovered that "there is no help in them."

The next morning there was to be a long ride, to show Mrs. Phillip the estate and surrounding country.

Constance excused herself from accompanying them, and her plea was readily admitted: no one wanted her. Mrs. Phillip went upstairs to get ready, and Constance stood at the parlour window, gazing out upon the "Nun's Walk," when Phillip entered the room.

"Oh, Constance, will you trust me with the key of Aunt Margaret's room? Henrietta has set her heart upon seeing the oratory."

He paused in some confusion; the inconvenience of his request seemed suddenly to strike him.

"You see," he continued, in a tone of apology, "she is such a child, and has been spoiled all her life. She is different to you."

He looked at her as he said this with an expression she well remembered, and the tone of his voice was gentle,—such as it had been in the old days of their intimacy. It had been his great charm, and it had not lost its spell; it signified, however, no more than that he wished to soften his abruptness, much as he would have begged pardon of a stranger against whom he had pushed accidentally.

To Constance, however, it seemed an indication that he still cared for her.

Before she could reply, however, Mr. Marchmont came to say that the horses had

been brought round. Mrs. Phillip entered immediately after him, equipped in a beautiful riding-habit, and the most becoming hat and plume imaginable. Constance went to the porch to see them mount. Mrs. Phillip took an immense time to draw on her gloves, and to mount on her saddle, and it was then a long time before she would dispense with the assiduities of the three gentlemen.

She certainly looked a very pretty creature, and sat her horse remarkably well. She was in high spirits, and laughed a little silvery laugh as she nodded to Constance, and hoped that no one would run away with her in their absence!

This laugh jarred horribly on Constance, who stood there feeling herself belonging to nobody, of no consequence to any one—bitter tears sprang to her eyes. Yes! this was her place—alone, and left outside all

the circles that loving hearts draw round home. What had she ever done that it should be so? Why was she to be treated like a criminal and an outcast? She felt proudly that she was worth so much more than that smiling, malicious woman who had just rode away; that she could be so good, and strong, and loving, in all the relations from which she was cut off for ever; and with every pulse in her heart beating and throbbing with passionate life, she was condemned to a long, dreary, joyless stagnation! Oh, how cruel and unjust the universe seemed! A blind, deaf fate ruling all; nothing to appeal to—nothing to pray to—all the agony of her bleeding heart of no account or significance, except to her own sense of suffering! All was purposeless, objectless, bewildering misery!

The teaching of her aunt, and exhortation to trust a Heavenly Father, who afflicts in

wisdom, and pities His children, and hears them when they call upon Him:—all this belief, which had hitherto built up her courage, and lain at the bottom of her sorrow, was now swept away, and seemed a wild mocking fancy. A black, frightful atheism fell upon her soul. Where was God, that she should believe in Him? The horror of desolation fell upon her; she was alone, and her own misery was the only reality she could grasp.

But even at this moment the sense of her own suffering faded before the sharp, cold, spiritual darkness which closed round her, killing all faith in the meaning which she had hitherto discerned in life. This struck upon her soul with an ineffable pang, beyond any sorrow that had befallen her. It was the opening of a "lower deep," which threatened to swallow her down quick. The horror of that moment was unspeakable;

she looked round in mad affright: the trees, the fields, the country, the singing birds, all suddenly seemed to stand out in hard mechanical reality, devoid of any other meaning than what appeared. No, there was no refuge, none; no God, no help, no hope!

She staggered into the garden, and flinging herself upon the damp grass, she shrieked aloud in her despair. She alone, alive and conscious in the midst of a hard, stony, unconscious universe. The mad, unspeakable Fear clove the depths of her soul like lightning; it was not to be endured and live. Stunned and blasted she lay upon the grass: consciousness for a while gave way.

She was at last aroused by Nanny, who had come out to seek her.

“Oh! Miss Constance, what are you doing, to lie there without bonnet or shawl?

How can you be so imprudent! You will have caught your death of cold."

Constance started to her feet with an air of bewilderment.

"Oh! good gracious, Miss Constance, you look dreadful! have you seen a spirit? Come in and go to bed; you are not fit to be up."

"Oh! no, I am quite well; how long have they been gone?"

"I will tell you what it is," replied the old woman; "I was with your aunt, who is gone, in all her troubles, and I know the look of them again in you. You are just fretting yourself to death for the sake of a selfish, good-for-nothing, set-up jackanapes—let him be as he is, he is not worth your minding, nor his fine lady-wife (who is no lady at all) either."

A strange smile passed over the face of Constance; that grief had quite been ab-

sorbed in the horror that, like deep sleep, had fallen upon her.

“That is a very little thing, Nanny.”

“Well, that is right; I am glad you can think so; but now come in-doors and change your things.”

Nanny led her like a child into her own room, and made her lie down, enjoining her upon no account to rise until she came to call her. No sooner had the door closed behind old Nanny, than Constance arose from the bed, and scarcely conscious of what she did, knelt down with the instinct of habit, and buried her face in the bed clothes. She uttered no words, but there she knelt in her helplessness and deep need; the tears fell heavily down her cheeks like strong rain; they were her only utterance. By degrees the violence of them abated, the calm of exhaustion fell upon her, and she slept.

It was late in the day when she awoke; the storm had overpast, but it had left her weak and broken.

“Cast me not away from Thy presence,”

rose almost unconsciously from her lips.

The deep dread that had fallen upon her made all other sorrow that the world contained appear as nothing in comparison.

CHAPTER XIII.

OLD NANNY entered with a cup of warm jelly, and a plate of her own peculiar biscuits, which were as thin and as white as writing paper.

“Dear, dear; now, Miss Constance, did I not beg of you to lie still. You are not one bit fit to be up; but drink this before you begin to dress. I expect they will be back before long.”

“Oh! thank you, Nanny, this is very good.”

“I am glad of it, darling; but now keep

up your spirits, and do not give in to that conceited, upstart little madam. She will think you are fretting after her husband, for I'll be bound she knows that he came courting to you before ever there was a thought about her; that fine mincing waiting-maid of hers has been asking me no end of questions about you, but I made short work with her, and begged her to go to her lady's chamber, for that I could not cook with the like of her looking on."

"Well, Nanny, I am all the better for that jelly; and I will dress now, if you will stop and help me."

"I reckon she will be dressing when she comes; she is made up of fine clothes; but, Miss Constance, could you not smarten yourself up a little? You have plenty of chains and brooches, and I cannot bear to see you put out with her finery."

"No, Nanny, they would not suit

mourning, and I dare say she enjoys being better dressed than I am, so why should I hinder her? People do not get much to make them happy in this world."

"Indeed they do not; and it seems to me as if everybody got hold of what does not suit them, and would have made somebody else glad enough. But I will tell you how it is;—those who don't want a thing are sure to have it, and those who want, must not have. Things are queerly ordered in this world."

Old Nanny was not a sceptic, nor a grumbler in general, but she was very indignant to see the manner in which her young lady was treated. She considered Phillip a false-hearted, worthless fellow, quite beneath her mistress; but that did not prevent her being very jealous of his want of attention to her.

"Miss Constance, you look just perished.

I doubt you caught a cold. You must wrap yourself well up. You can wear this scarf, it will keep you warm." And Nanny unwrapped a sumptuous crimson Cashmere scarf, which she put carefully round Constance. She did not leave her until she had pulled the most comfortable easy chair close to the fire, and seen Constance seated in it; and even then she lingered about the room, unwilling that she should be left alone.

The riding party did not arrive until it was quite dusk. Their ride had been extended to show Mrs. Phillip more of the country, and to call upon the family at Willesdale Chase, who were old friends of Charles Herbert's, and distant connexions of Mrs. Phillip's.

Of course, no dinner could be thought of until Mrs. Phillip had adorned herself to her heart's content. On this day it pleased

her to affect a pretty rustic simplicity, and at the end of three-quarters of an hour, she made her appearance in white muslin, trimmed with blue ribbon, and white roses in her hair.

She was in high spirits, and a very good temper. A fashionable, portionless girl like herself might well be delighted to find herself possessed of a beautiful estate, in addition to all the *éclat* of being a bride, and all the flattery and admiration which her husband and father-in-law had lavished upon her. Her vain little head was completely turned. She entered the parlour, where Constance was dreamily waiting, with a mincing affectation of amiability.

“Are we not shameful people to have kept away so long! What have you done with yourself all the day? Phillip and I were wondering whether any one would have made a descent upon the house, and

carried you and old Nanny off to America! But what a superb scarf! Where did you get it?"

She appeared to consider it quite impossible that Constance could possess anything valuable or handsome. Her tone of surprise was much what it would have been if she had discovered the same article in the possession of her maid. She could not endure to see any one else possess what she did not.

"Oh, Phillip!" she cried, in a childish, petted voice; "I must have a Cashmere scarf like this. I cannot exist without one."

Phillip did not appear to hear; but Charles Herbert said, "I am sure Constance will be very glad to give you hers, since you admire it. It is one I brought from India myself long ago."

Constance made no reply to this proposal;

and Mrs. Phillip, though she looked covetously at the costly scarf said, "Oh! I could not think of robbing Constance; it is too precious for one woman to give to another."

The summons to dinner cut short the conversation, which had reached a somewhat embarrassing point. After dinner, the evening passed much as the previous one had done, in that Mrs. Phillip engrossed all the talk and all the attention. Charles Herbert, however, instead of sitting down to *écarté*, devoted himself to her, paying her the most assiduous attentions, and flattering her with a timid deprecating air, as if he were endeavouring to pay his court to some one who had power to harm him greatly.

Phillip took a book, and seemed inclined to sleep; but Mr. Marchmont addressed himself to Constance, which his fair daughter-in-law no sooner perceived, than

she contrived to claim and engross all his notice, throwing Constance completely in the shade, as though she were a young woman allowed to sit in the parlour on sufferance.

This behaviour did not mortify Constance to-night: she was quite indifferent to it; neither did Phillip's neglect cause her any heartache,—*that* nerve had (at least for the present) ceased to quiver. But she was greatly troubled by her father's strange and, as it appeared to her, undignified behaviour. It was so unworthy of his age and position; and Mrs. Phillip received his attention with an impertinent, careless politeness, which scarcely veiled her contempt and indifference. The more assiduously Charles sought to flatter her, the more indifferent the lady became.

At length she rose, with a slight yawn, and said, "I dare say it would amuse you,

Constance, to look at my jewels, and some of the beautiful presents I was telling you about. Phillip, darling, if you will ring, Dawson shall bring my dressing-case, and I can pack it at the same time, as we start so early to-morrow."

The dressing-case was brought, and Mrs. Phillip displayed, with affected indifference, all the glittering ornaments she possessed, with the names of all the fine people who had presented them, Charles Herbert listening and admiring with an anxious imbecility of face that struck Constance very painfully.

"There are many beautiful jewels here," said he, bowing with old-fashioned gallantry; "but, in my opinion, the owner is the greatest gem of them all."

He so evidently desired to propitiate her, that it was painful to see so young a girl treat him with insolent indifference; it

bespoke such a cold, hard nature lying underneath those superficial smiles.

“I hope I shall have better fortune with my jewels,” said she, as she began to replace them in their white satin cases, “than the poor dear Marchioness of Tyrawly. You must know that she is just the very ugliest old woman in the world, and as miserly as she is ugly. Her diamond necklace was superb; but then her neck, when she wore it, was so red and wrinkled, that one could think of nothing but Sinbad’s expedient for making the Rocs descend to the Valley of Diamonds! She had a star-shaped ornament of sapphires which was especially magnificent; it used to hang as a pendant upon her capacious bosom. There was a Maltese cross of rubies, the like of which has seldom been seen, and a tiara set with all manner of the very finest stones, besides no end of other ornaments.

With all these fine things, she was a stingy, miserable old woman, who used to practise the most absurd hardships and economies. If she would only have sold her least little diamond, she might have lived sumptuously to her life's end, but she could never have found it in her heart to spend the money.

“Well, only imagine her despair when all these fine jewels were stolen in one night, no one knows how, and not the slightest trace has ever been discovered of them, from that time to this. They vanished so completely and mysteriously that they might all have been dissolved, like Cleopatra's pearl. No suspicion fell on any one in particular, and so far as can be ascertained, they have never been offered for sale. That great bank robbery took place about the same time, which has never been discovered either. If the old Marchioness would only have offered a fine reward, it

would have brought some tidings of them; but, would you believe it, that wretched old woman could not be induced to offer any specific sum; she thought the reward offered by the bank would serve her purpose as well. For, she said, when those concerned in the bank robbery were discovered, those who stole her jewels would not be far off; the consequence is, that she has kept her money and lost her jewels, which were worth a king's ransom."

During this history, Charles Herbert exhibited great signs of discomfort, and moved listlessly about the room in a manner quite inconsistent with his previous devoted attention to every word that fell from her lips, and was, in fact, quite impolite. Before she had concluded, he began to stir the fire furiously, and upset the fender and fire-irons with a crash extremely startling. Everybody made an exclamation of sur-

prise. A stop was effectually put to the conversation, for Mrs. Phillip, in her alarm, snapped the string of a pearl bracelet, and the beads went rolling in all directions upon the floor, and, of course, every one was called upon to assist in recovering them, which occupied until bed-time. Contrary to his usual habits, Charles Herbert retired also, instead of remaining for a time with Mr. Marchmont.

Constance was thankful to be alone, but she was too thoroughly worn out to feel at once disposed to retire to bed, and wrapping herself in her dressing-gown, she sat down in a large easy-chair, until she should recover a little energy.

She was aroused by a soft, timid knock at her door, which was repeated the moment after with a suppressed impatience. She rose to open it in some alarm, and found her father.

He made her a sign to be silent, and came in, carefully closing the door after him with mysterious caution.

"Are you ill? is anything the matter?" she said, anxiously.

"Hush! no, nothing. Only I wish to consult you what we ought to do about Mrs. Phillip."

"What of her? does she need anything?"

"No," replied Charles, in a solemn whisper, placing his candlestick upon the dressing-table, and looking with a sort of embarrassment at his daughter. "But do you not think that we ought to make her some present? it seems to me that she expects it, and it will conciliate her. My dear child, we must conciliate her; it is of the greatest consequence; and I thought if you were to give her your Indian scarf that she admired, it would be suitable."

"I have not the least desire to conciliate Mrs. Phillip. There is no reason why she is to be conciliated, except that she is very disagreeable and ill-bred, which, as she is to go away to-morrow, is of little consequence. That Indian scarf belonged to my mother, and I shall certainly not give it away to Mrs. Phillip."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" said Charles, in a whimper; "and you refuse to give up that scarf to save you poor old father from danger, perhaps from ruin; how cruel and ungrateful you are; I never expected such conduct from you."

"If it were to do you any good, I would give up anything I possess, and that you know quite well, but I shall not give anything as a bribe to Mrs. Phillip; it would, besides, be entirely useless. If she can cause us any annoyance, and if she feels disposed to use her power, she will not be withheld

by gratitude for a scarf, or for any other gift that could be bestowed. You are quite mistaken if you fancy she is a woman to be 'conciliated.' Besides, what is it she can do to harm us?"

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! you are so violent. Why do you speak so cross to me? I am your father, and you ought to obey me. I *will* be obeyed," said Charles, in a tone of querulous complaint.

"I have no intention to be either cross or violent, but I wish to know what it is that you fear from Mrs. Phillip? Can you not trust me?"

"That I know best—she can do us the greatest harm, and we must conciliate her, I tell you—she can. Oh, dear! how very obstinate you are. She can drive us out of this house to-morrow, if she chooses."

Charles spoke this in a nervous despera-

tion, and looked anxiously at Constance to see how she took it.

“Who gave her the power? and since when has it ceased to be your own house?”

“That is not your concern; I will not be questioned; it was for your good—all intended for your good, and you fly out upon me in this manner! Oh, dear! oh, dear! I wish I were dead; I wish I had never been born!” and he began to wring his hands in an excited manner.

Constance looked at him with anxious alarm, he appeared to be at once so feeble and so vehement. She endeavoured to soothe him, and asked no questions that were likely to touch on painful subjects, for she ascribed all his dread of Mrs. Phillip to a morbid idea which he had taken up, as he was constantly taking up others. She tried to persuade him to go to bed, pro-

mising to think over his proposal before morning, and begged him to let her assist him to undress.

Gradually he became more calm, but he would not allow her to go near his room; and the very proposal seemed to excite such terrible fear in his mind, that she desisted; and having with some difficulty prevailed on him to take some medicine which had been prescribed for these occasions of nervous terror, she persuaded him to retire to his own room.

A painful sense of anxiety pressed upon her mind; she felt that trouble was nigh at hand, although she was completely in the dark as to its nature, or the quarter whence it was to arise. It completely withdrew her thoughts from her own personal sorrow. Full of vague forebodings, and in deep depression of spirits, she at length lay down in bed: all mental energy or vitality seemed

extinct within her; she fancied she was too miserable to sleep, but utterly weary and exhausted, she fell into a slumber, through which she was still conscious of being very miserable; and her anxiety took the shape of an endless argument,—the continuation of her interview with her father,—which she was obliged to pursue the whole night without arriving at any conclusion.

The next morning she rose early; she scarcely needed to awake. Breakfast had been ordered an hour before the usual time, as Phillip and his wife were to depart immediately afterwards. Before she was dressed, a message was brought from her father to beg she would come into his room.

She found him in bed: ill, and very low. He was in such a state of bodily and mental prostration as to be quite unable to rise. He was terrified at the idea of seeing Mrs. Phillip again, and he had sent for Constance

to entreat her to protect him, and to keep Mrs. Phillip out of his room if she should wish to bid him good-bye. There was something pitiful in this abject, cowardly shrinking from the sight of a young girl; but Constance was alarmed at the change that had come over him in the course of a night: his face looked shrunken, and he seemed many years older than on the previous day. An expression of anxious imbecility marked his countenance and attitude: he seemed to be breaking up.

“Be everything that is attentive and polite to Mrs. Phillip, for me; do not let her be offended, but tell her I am ill. You must protect me, Constance, and you must conciliate her. I shall not be here long to be a charge to any one. Don’t let me be turned out of this house before I am dead, and then it does not matter what becomes of me.”

He spoke in the childish, whining voice so distressing to listen to in the aged.

Constance tried to pacify him—promised to keep Mrs. Phillip away if she proposed to come, and said she would send Nanny to sit with him. When he was a little calmer she left him, and went down stairs, resolved to obtain some insight into the mysterious power which Mr. Marchmont held over their destinies.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE was not the least danger that Mrs. Phillip would persecute Charles Herbert with any polite attentions. She and her husband had had a pretty sharp quarrel, the remains of which were not dispersed when they assembled at the breakfast-table. Mrs. Phillip looked exceedingly cross. All the thin sugar of smiling sweetness had quite disappeared. She was almost ugly, and showed how little attraction she would possess after the first bloom of gratified vanity had worn off.

She was rude to her father-in-law, rude to Constance, snappish to her husband, and occupied the whole of breakfast-time in declaring they should be too late for dinner at her grandfather's, and wishing that they had gone yesterday.

Phillip looked sulky and annoyed at her childish pertinacity, but ate his breakfast in silence. Mr. Marchmont looked on with his impassible stony eyes, and spoke in his softest voice, but made no attempt to divert the subject.

Phillip had lost this his first quarrel; not that he particularly cared for the subject of it, but it was the first shock his self-complacency had ever received.

The quarrel had begun, like so many others, quite by accident. He had said, whilst shaving, that it would only be polite in them to ask Constance and her father to come and see them some time. Mrs.

Phillip chose to resent this as a high breach of her privileges to invite whom she pleased, and as a sign that he was still in love with that half-mad girl, who, besides, did not move in the position of life in which she chose to make her acquaintance. She exhibited all the resources which a shrewish tongue and a malicious temper can give to a cunning, artful woman.

Phillip's experience in such warfare was—nothing; and for the present time he bowed beneath the torrent of words he had unluckily called forth. He was much afraid lest his wife should embarrass him by some gratuitous and undisguised insolence to Constance; and he made his peace as well as he could by declaring that he never wanted to see Constance again, and that he had only intended what he proposed as a matter of form. But Mrs. Phillip was in an ill-humour, and would not cede its

privileges a moment sooner than she pleased.

She left the table without apology as soon as she had finished her own breakfast. Phillip appeared a little relieved. He had the grace to feel ashamed of his wife's rudeness, and inquired from Constance after her father more in the old style of their intercourse, and expressed a lame sort of hope that they might see her when they should be settled in their new home.

But it was too late; Constance was no longer to be charmed with looks and tones. She had entered upon deeper anxieties than any that concerned him.

The chaise came to the door. Mrs. Phillip tripped down, fully equipped for her journey; her maid followed, laden with the innumerable objects that filled the carriage whenever her mistress chose to travel. The boxes had all been packed upon the chaise, the dress-

ing-case with all its treasures was safely bestowed, and then Mrs. Phillip found a moment to take leave of her hostess, which she did much as though she had been leaving an inn.

"Good-bye, Miss Herbert. You have given us a pleasant visit. I fear we have given you much trouble. I shall never pass this way without calling. I hope your father will soon be better."

She was busy gathering up the folds of her rich silk dress, and stepping into the chaise; both her hands were engaged, which might be the reason why she did not offer to shake hands with Constance; and when she was seated, she was so much occupied in arranging all her things, that she never looked at her. Mr. Marchmont she had already embraced with the affected *empressment* of a dutiful daughter. Phillip said, "Good-bye, Constance," and sprang

in'after his wife; the directions were given to the post-boys, the door was shut, and the chaise drove under the old archway, carrying with it all the hopes and dreams that had lighted up the life of poor Constance! Yes; she was now entirely without any illusion or hope about Phillip or about his wife. She did not regret it; but she felt very bare and joyless among the realities that were left, and amongst which she was imprisoned, with no hope of escape. Her love of Phillip had gone away out of her life; it was not Phillip that she regretted—it was the habit of loving which had suddenly been suppressed.

But there was her conference with Mr. Marchmont. He was preparing to walk away towards the fields. She ran after him and called him back. She must know the worst that was hanging over her.

viewing all human feelings that might suffer in the enforcement of his rights and claims in the way of business; naturally cold-hearted and intensely selfish, he had now become utterly passionless and insensible to pity or sympathy. He had no ill-will to Constance, and nothing but contempt for her father. His manners had always been reserved and quiet, and Constance saw no difference in them at this moment than when he had been most friendly; and this monotonous quietness was more terrible than any violence could have been.

"But, Mr. Marchmont," said Constance, rousing herself after the stupified pause that followed his last words, "you surely are not going away thus? I cannot speak to my father, nor show that I have any cognizance of his transactions with you. From you the communication must come. He will feel less humiliated. As a matter

of business, it ought not to come from me."

"I have no objection; he is in his bedroom, you say. I will go now."

He turned from her, and entered the house; their conversation had taken place beside the gateway, where she had stopped him. Constance remained like one in a bad dream. She looked round at the old house with its gables and quaint chimneys, at the farm-yard, and the Lime-tree Walk beyond, as if they were seen in a mirror. She could not believe that what she had heard within the last few moments was true, or that it ever could come to pass. She every moment expected something to awaken her. She walked slowly to the house, and went through into the garden, and sat dreamily down upon a bench beneath the sitting-room window. In a short time she was rejoined by Mr. Marchmont, who

appeared as much discomposed as his nature would allow.

“How was your father when you left him this morning? Did you notice anything remarkable about him?”

“Nothing, except that he seemed very low and nervous, as though he was afraid of something.”

“Well, he is mad now—quite mad. If I did not know him to be a strictly temperate man, I should say he had *delirium tremens*. You must have a keeper for him. You cannot manage him alone. Who has seen him this morning besides yourself?”

“No one but Nanny, when she took his breakfast.”

“Has anything happened to frighten him? Has he had any letters? There is some mystery at the bottom of it. I found him sitting on the floor with his back against the wall, raving that no one should enter.

He was very violent, and I had great difficulty in making him recognise me; then he crept back to bed quietly enough. But it cannot go on, you must have a keeper for him. He may break out again any minute, and do himself or some one else a mischief. Is there any one about the farm who could be brought in to attend on him?"

"I will go to him," said Constance, quietly; "I am not afraid. He will be made worse by the sight of a stranger. He cannot endure any one to enter his room."

"So, so. Well, he must be removed as soon as possible. You cannot keep him in your own house; he had better be taken to an asylum."

"There is no one in the world to care for him but me; and now that the doom is come upon him, I will attend upon him until it overtakes me also."

Constance spoke with a patient despair that might have touched any one who beheld her. She seemed to be quite alone in the world, and no one to care what she did.

Mr. Marchmont was thinking how this new incident would interfere with his plans.

"That is mere romance. You have no legal claim upon me; but in this respect I shall take upon me to act as your guardian. I am going to London on other business. I think I know a suitable person to assist in taking charge of your father until some final arrangement can be made. You are too young to turn your own home into a mad-house."

"I never will consent to his going elsewhere. My home is his, so long as he lives."

"If he should be violent," continued Mr.

Marchmont, as though she had not spoken, "a couple of the farm-servants should be at hand. I will see to that. Do not manifest any alarm, if you can help it."

Constance, though with a beating heart and sickening dread, entered her father's room, but with entire composure of manner. She had expected to see she knew not what, and was inexpressibly relieved to find him lying quietly in bed.

"Ah, Constance! is it you? I thought you would never come. What has old Marchmont been telling you? I frightened him famously, I think. He wont come here again in a hurry."

"He says he is going to London in half-an-hour. The horses are being saddled now."

"Going to London, is he?" cried Charles Herbert, joyfully. "That is right; a good riddance of him! Are you sure he is going?"

"Quite sure. I hear the sound of the horses now in the yard."

"Go and see him off, and bring me word when he is really gone. I will not believe it until you tell me."

Constance thought it best to humour him, and went away accordingly. She found Nanny in great agitation and terror, but quieted her by saying that her father seemed much as usual, and that she believed he had only been playing a trick on Mr. Marchmont to drive him away. She spoke as cheerfully as she could. There was no time to tell Nanny the other intelligence which had come upon her that morning, it would take some time to communicate. Mr. Marchmont and his groom had departed, and she must return to her father.

When he found that the man he feared was really gone, the change that passed over him was indescribable. His abject

terror passed away, and he became like a child delivered from the fear of punishment, quite quiet and gentle. He refused, however, to get up, and would not have Constance out of his sight for a moment. He talked to her rationally, and seemed to be relieved that she at length knew that the Chauntry was passed away from them. He entered into excuses for his conduct, and it seemed a great relief to speak upon the subject. He declared that the desire to rehabilitate her fortune had been his chief inducement to gamble, and repeated again and again that it was for her sake.

Only one thing struck Constance as strange. He talked a great deal, and without any of the reserve which was habitual to him; but behind all that he communicated so freely, there lurked something else. Once or twice he appeared to

approach it and then left it. The two things taken together made her fear that there was something amiss with him, but he was so submissive and gentle, so different to what she had feared, that, combined with the immense relief of having lost their visitors, she felt almost happy.

Every hour that passed increased her confidence in herself, and in the consciousness that she was gaining an ascendancy over her father. She believed, too, that she now knew the worst that hung over them, and it was a relief from the dull, vague presentiment that had haunted her in spite of her day dreams. She experienced the fact that realities, however sombre or painful, have a certain strength in them that is better than all the enervating sweetness of dreams and hopes.

During the afternoon her father slept a little, and she wrote to Mrs. Harrop a

detailed account of the events of the last few days, events which seemed to place the gulf of many years betwixt her and her past life.

At night she retired to rest at her usual hour; her father seemed quite well, and to wish it. But the next morning he was worse; much excited, and muttering a great deal to himself; extremely restless; making violent incoherent exclamations from time to time, as if under the dominion of some painful thought. It had struck him in the night, that Marchmont suspected the secret of his possessing those jewels, and had gone to town to give information, and would return with officers of justice to search the house. All grew clear and plausible as he dwelt on this idea. He grew entirely to believe it, and in the morning he was nearly in a brain fever, from the incessant working of his thoughts

as to what he should say, and how he should act when they arrived.

Constance and Nanny persuaded him to get up, which, for a time, dissipated his black spectres, but they returned again and again; not as things he positively believed, but they seemed probable. He had so much reason to fear the worst, that he began to believe his own imaginations.

Mr. Marchmont did not return the next day, which was a respite to every one, and Charles began to be more composed. His reason was vacillating, but it was not yet overthrown. He slept well that night, and awoke the next morning quite able to discern the difference between mountains and clouds. But he appeared to cling to Constance as his only protection from some dread uncertain danger, and he would not suffer her to leave him for an instant.

The evening of the third day Mr. Marchmont returned, and brought with him a young man of about six and twenty; depressed, shy, and slightly deformed. His long straight hair was dry and pale; his face had a painful expression of suffering and suppressed emotion, but with all this there was a look of intellect and cultivation.

CHAPTER XV.

THAT night, after she had at length attained the haven of her own room, harassed and worn out by the incidents of the day, Constance, too weary to undress herself, sat down in the large chair that had belonged to her aunt.

No longer called upon for exertion, all the difficulties that surrounded her came thronging before her, black and shadowy as the flickering fantastic shadows that the fire-light sent into the corners of the room and upon the walls from the quaint old furniture.

The sense of her own helplessness crushed her down; she felt, too, so ignorant of what she ought to do as regarded her father. That his mind was failing, had been failing for some time past, was now evident. She had no one at hand to whom she might turn for counsel or assistance; she stood alone in the world, but it was no vain self-pity that touched her; if she had only known the right thing and the best thing to do, she had plenty of courage to follow it out in action.

Almost unconsciously, she wondered that Phillip should so completely have vanished from her thoughts; but it was not of herself that she was thinking, but, only how she could do right in this new and terrible emergency of her father's breaking-up. Suddenly, like a black veil falling upon her, came the deep gloom of the dreadful thought that had struck her that day in

the garden: If there were *no* God? *no* Heavenly Father! Again that doubt shivered to the depth of her soul, the very earth seemed to be moved from beneath her feet.

It was no theological difficulty, no pride of intellect, but a deep, black, insane disbelief that cut her life away from its anchorage, and left her drifting in darkness and the shadow of death. She had always had a strong natural piety, a childlike confidence in prayer: as a child might go to its father, it was her instinct and consolation in all her grievances.

As to the doctrines which she had been taught, it had never occurred to her to doubt them, or that they could be doubted. Morbid scepticism, or aspirations to find some other rule of life, were not the fashion in that day, and had never been suggested to her by any influence from without. She de-

sired no respite from the stern duties under which she had to lead her life. Poor child, it was strength, not respite, that her soul wanted; and instead of Life, the shadow of Death had fallen upon her. Intellectual scepticism has a certain pride of life, the active exercise of the power of mind—searching out and satisfying “obstinate questionings” which will take no denial. It is a course of intellectual exercise—healthful, necessary even to certain natures—but to Constance it was dreadful. She sat cowering in the chair, with her face hidden in her hands, every nerve quivering with the “terror that made her afraid.” She was powerless to fight against it, for it could not be grappled with by any reason or wisdom of her own. The agony of the moment was terrible; she uttered no words, but surely every breath was a dumb cry for help; and the help came.

Constance started, threw back the long hair that had fallen over her face and shoulders, and raised her head as a sudden thought flashed upon her.

"Surely," she exclaimed aloud, "I am going mad! and this is the shape the madness takes in me! This thought is not *true*, then, it is only **MAD!**"

The intense relief that followed to the poor child, as this solution to her terrible doubt occurred to her, would be difficult to describe; it satisfied her at once; she knew that madness hung over her life, and now she had obtained a glimpse of what it really meant, but the fear of going mad was as nothing compared with the strange and terrible question that had covered her soul with its blackness.

She once more endeavoured to arrange what she had to do on the morrow, but her physical strength was exhausted.

She began to dose, and at last recognised that the first thing that needed to be done by her, was to go to bed and fall asleep as fast as she could. It is a motherly provision of nature, that

“The blessed barrier betwixt day and day,”

generally gives us a pause to revive our strength before any great strain upon our faculties.

The next morning she awoke quite ready to meet whatever the day might bring forth.

When she descended to breakfast, Mr. Marchmont was alone in the room: he was making some calculation in his note-book, and did not see her.

“Ah!” said he, looking up as he returned the book to his pocket, “I hope I see you well. How is your father this morning?”

“I scarcely know; he refuses to get up;

but he is quite rational, and seems calmer. He is much perplexed why you have brought that young man here. What is his name? I did not catch it last night."

"Scott—Cornelius Scott; you will find him of great use during your father's removal; you could not manage him yourself."

"He looks ill, and very unhappy," said Constance.

"You may say that—he and the world have not hit it together exactly—and the world being the stronger of the two, it has gone pretty hard with him. His father was the manager of that bank which was robbed some eighteen months ago. His room was discovered to be on fire: suspicion fell upon him that he had connived at the robbery, and set his private room on fire to conceal the fact. The evidence told against him, though I think

he was only a weak fool; he had nothing to do with the robbery, but he was frightened, and lost his head. I believe he set fire to the place to stop all examination, for fear any suspicion should fall on him. Of course he ran into the danger he feared. He was tried and transported. This son was in an excellent situation in a Government office; he lost it in consequence of his father's affair, and has been badly enough off ever since; he has his mother to keep as well as himself. He is a good fellow, but very soft, and fancies that everybody has read his father's trial."

Mr. Marchmont spoke in his low, suppressed, even voice, and his eyes never varied for an instant from their stony, unwavering gaze. He did not add that the young man came to him for next to nothing, and did the work of two clerks.

"Poor young man!" said Constance,

compassionately. "I have often wondered what becomes of the rest of a family when the head of it has committed some dreadful crime. It must, I think, be the hardest of all calamities to endure, to have one's name disgraced in a court of justice. I cannot imagine how people survive it."

"Oh, I don't know; they are soon forgotten, and then they creep about again. But about your father's journey? You had better remove him at once, before he grows worse. He can understand reason as it is, and the quieter it can be done the better."

Constance looked in amaze at the man who could speak thus coolly of the total ruin and uprooting of her father, with whom he had lived on such terms of intimacy for years. Mr. Scott entered the room at that moment, looking timid and unhappy—a chronic unhappiness, that was beyond comfort. Constance spoke to him

kindly, and gave him his breakfast. But she did not remain at table; she went to her father.

She found him in a state of restless impatience, and very anxious to know "who that young man was? and why Marchmont had brought him there? Some scheme of his."

Constance told him what she had heard, and was shocked and alarmed at the effect it had upon her father. He cowered beneath the bed-clothes, and the perspiration stood in beads upon his forehead.

"He shall not come here," said he. "I won't see him. Keep him away from me!"

"But, my father, we must leave this house; and I cannot send away the young man; he belongs to Mr. Marchmont."

"I tell you, Constance, it will kill me to leave this house. Marchmont took advan-

tage of me. He made an iniquitous bargain. He dare not go into a court of law; and I will defy him."

He spoke in a hard, excited voice, and with violence. Constance tried to suggest her house in Yorkshire, and said how much she wished him to see it, and how much she desired to go there herself. But it took no effect. He continued to talk with great excitement, and dropped words that alarmed Constance—revealing dimly (even though she believed them the workings of delirium) some guilty mystery that lay in the past of his life, and which was the reason of his opposition to leaving the house.

It was a terrible complication of her anxiety and perplexity. She hoped that it was only a fixed idea—a delusion of his diseased brain; but she had a sickening instinct that there was some foundation for

what he said. All her life she had had a dull fear that her father had done something wrong. Even as a little child, he had seemed to her like one suffering the penalty of remorse for some hidden deed. As she grew older she had reasoned the idea away; but now it recurred with the force of a certainty.

"What is it you fear? What is it you have done, father? Tell me, and I will do my best to help you. Of what are you afraid?"

"Afraid? I fear nothing. No one can find aught against me. You forget yourself. I do not understand such language. Go away—go."

A knock came to the door. Old Nanny stood with a letter in her hand—a letter with a foreign post-mark. It was directed to her father. She hesitated about giving it to him, but he caught it from her hand.

The reading of it agitated him dreadfully. He insisted on being left alone. To pacify him she went away. No sooner had the door closed than he got cautiously out of bed, and began to examine carefully the part of the wall he had built up. To his excited fancy it seemed as though every one who entered the room must have their attention attracted to this spot, and he heartily wished he had left the room as it was. He began to imagine the dressing-room as he had left it, and what would be found, if the doorway were broken through. All the caution and pains he had expended were forgotten, or were at least vain to reassure him, it was now quite impossible to rectify anything, and all his efforts at concealment seemed like sand running through his fingers, which he was powerless to retain.

Charles Herbert might be a weak, worthless man, but his present sufferings, arising

from what was so *nearly* guilt, and which, if discovered, would bring upon him all the ignominy of a crime, were so intense that his worst enemy must have pitied him. The fear, the helplessness, the horrible anxiety, dissolved his whole nature into abject cowardice. All his bones seemed out of joint; his strength was as water; his arms fell powerless, and every nerve was unstrung; a horrible sickness possessed him; he walked with hasty, staggering steps about the room, his knees refusing to support his weight. If he could only have got through the wall to see how things were! But there was nothing he could do.

He attempted to drag a heavy press to put before the book-case with which he had already barricaded the entrance to the fatal closet, but his eager and trembling fingers seemed to melt away like snow whenever they tried to grasp it. A knock that

came to the door sounded to his ears like the thunder of doom. After a pause, which seemed to him an interminable suspense, Constance came softly in, bringing a basin of hot tea. There was nothing terrible in her looks, but the wretched man hid his face, and uttered a cry of startled, despairing fear, like an animal brought to bay.

Constance spoke gently; but he did not listen. Whilst she was endeavouring to rouse his attention, she was again called out by old Nanny, who beckoned to her with mysterious vehemence.

"There is a fellow downstairs, who is just come. He says he *must* see the master. An ill-looking chap as ever you could see. What must be done?—what had we best do?"

"I don't know, indeed. Where is Mr. Marchmont?"

“He is gone out, and that Stranger fellow along with him.”

“I will go down myself, and see if he will tell me his business.”

“And I will stop with master and see if I can get him back to bed: he is as cold as a robin.”

Constance found a hard-featured, sinister-looking man standing before the fire, neither clean nor respectable in his attire—a kind of man not to be readily asked to sit down in any house where business or ill luck brought him. Constance instinctively drew back. What could such a man as this have to say to her father?

“My father is ill—can see no one. Will you tell me your business?” said she, in a severely composed manner.

“No, my young lady; I cannot tell you my errand. Your father would not thank me for doing so. I must see him, and at once.”

"But he is ill, in a fever—he is not quite himself. Indeed, he cannot receive you."

"He has had a letter this morning, has he not?"

"He has."

"And been worse since, perhaps?"

"He was ill before."

"I know all that ails him. He will be better after I have spoken to him. Show me to his room at once."

"But indeed it will be dangerous. It may kill him to be startled with the sight of a stranger!"

"All nonsense; and, besides, if it were to kill him, as you call it, twice over, I still must see him! Show me to his room, or I shall find it for myself."

"Let me at least go and prepare him?"

"No, no; better not. He would be barring the door, and then we should have to

break it open, and make the devil of a noise. I will go now."

Constance wished to gain time, until the farm servants came to their dinner; but the stranger put her on one side, and proceeded, without further parley, upstairs. The first door he opened was the door of Charles's bed-room. He opened it without knocking; Charles was in querulous altercation with Nanny: the curtain of the bed concealed him. The stranger paused; but only for an instant, and passed at once into the full light, standing like a spectre before the scared and excited vision of Charles!

In an instant his weakness was gone! Uttering a cry like a savage beast, he sprang upon the stranger's throat, and flung him to the ground; his head in the fall struck heavily against the sharp corner of the heavy oak press, which Charles had just dragged from its place.

The stranger, without a cry or groan, lay like one dead!

Constance and Nanny gave a cry of horror; and Charles Herbert seemed suddenly startled to consciousness of what he had done.

CHAPTER XVI.

BEFORE the shock of fear and astonishment which such a scene caused could subside, Mr. Marchmont entered the room. His imperturbable calm did not seem disturbed in the least. He went up to the prostrate man, and turned over his face.

Apparently it was not strange to him; for he said, quietly,—“Ah, indeed. How came he here at this time?” Then, addressing Constance, he desired her to summon the farmer and a couple of his servants to remove the man. “And you,” said he to John Scott,

who had followed him on hearing the noise of the scuffle, but who lingered timidly at the door, not knowing whether to enter or not, "you will attend to him, and dress the cut in his head. It looks ugly enough; but I do not think he will die of it—nothing short of hanging ever kills such rascals! Will you," said he, speaking to Nanny, "see that some place is prepared for him?—a hay-loft will be quite good enough. He can do no harm just at present; but when he comes to himself a little, your silver spoons will not be safe if he comes in their way."

He spoke in the quietest manner, as if he were issuing the most ordinary directions; but he looked aside, for the sight of the blood that had flowed from the wound in the man's head made him feel uncomfortable. He could have killed any one who crossed his plans or stood in his way,

with perfect indifference; but he could not endure the sight of a cut finger.

The farmer and two of his labourers came hastily to the room at the summons of Constance, looking stupidly curious. They were followed by the farmer's wife and the maid-servants, who began to ejaculate in different keys of wonder and horror; but they were speedily silenced by Mr. Marchmont, who sternly desired them not to be fools, but to go and fetch a bucket of water to clean the boards.

All he directed was done in an incredibly short time, for no one ever disobeyed Mr. Marchmont; there was a tone in his suppressed, quiet voice which made people feel that it would be better for them to do what he ordered. When the room was once more cleared—for even Constance had been sent away, to look for linen and bandages—Mr. Marchmont walked up to the bed, where

Charles Herbert lay cowering under the bedclothes, trembling, and not daring to look up. Mr. Marchmont stripped them down. Charles Herbert writhed like one touched suddenly with a burning iron, and endeavoured to hide his face.

"Now, tell me the meaning of all this. How comes that man here, and why did you try to kill him?"

Charles felt Mr. Marchmont's eyes upon him. They compelled him to raise his head and reply to him.

"I am sure I don't know," he whimpered. "Do not look so dreadfully at me. He is a bad man, and came to threaten me. Do tell me you will protect me."

"We will see about that afterwards. Tell me first why he came to threaten you. This letter will tell me, perhaps."

He took the crumpled paper that was clutched tightly in one of Charles's hands.

It contained very few lines, but they were sufficient to explain all that had occurred. The letter was dated from America.

"SIR,—The bank having offered a fresh reward of one thousand pounds for any information touching the great robbery a year-and-half ago, this comes to say that if you pay me that sum I will not endeavour to obtain the same by giving the information I possess. A friend of mine (one you have had dealings with before now) will wait upon you and make arrangements for receiving the money.

"I am, your well-wisher,

"J. M.

"MR. CHARLES HERBERT."

"So, my old acquaintance, John Maryland—a precious scoundrel—and this friend of his, with whom you have had dealings,

has ventured his neck in a noose by coming here,—he must have expected something more than his share of the reward. How came you connected with them? You had better tell me at once.”

Mr. Marchmont was really surprised, and very desirous to hear the facts, but nothing except a cold peremptory indifference could be discerned in his tone.

“I did not rob the bank. I knew nothing about it,” whined Charles, turning about uneasily, to escape from the inquisition of those cold passionless eyes, which were fixed upon him.

“How came you to have any dealings with these men, and what have you done that puts you in their power?”

“Nothing, nothing,—I swear I have done nothing, and they will hang me. Oh! what must I do?”

“Tell me where the money and the

jewels are concealed," replied Mr. Marchmont, with that perspicacity of insight into things that had made his fortune in life. "If you did not join in the robbery, you have received some of the proceeds and concealed your knowledge, which makes you an accomplice. My good friend, you have been a great fool, and in attempting to deceive me you are only adding to your danger. Tell me exactly all that has happened."

Charles Herbert's senses appeared to be melting away in abject terror; and he seemed incapable of comprehending what was said to him; but Mr. Marchmont's will concentrated for a moment his scattered faculties, and he gave a tolerably clear account of the transaction by which he became the luckless possessor of such fatal treasure.

"And where is it now?" asked Mr.

Marchmont, as Charles concluded. But that secret was the very core of his life;— he was entirely unable to utter it. He fell into a violent fit of weeping and trembling, until the bed shook under him. Constance entered the room to ascertain how her father was, and stood in terrified surprise at the condition in which she beheld him.

“Miss Herbert, you had better retire, and keep all others from this chamber. This is no scene for you; leave me to deal alone with your father.”

“You are killing him,” replied Constance, passionately. “You are driving him to madness by some secret knowledge you possess about him. You see that he cannot resist you; it is worse than murder. You shall not torture him. I will remain, I have the right to do so; and before me you dare not question him, lest I, too, should obtain some knowledge of your ways.”

"Miss Herbert, you are excited: the scenes you have witnessed to-day have been too much for you. It is absolutely necessary that your father should reply to my questions. Do not waste your strength in womanish appeals. You will need it all. How is your patient?"

"Constance! Constance! do not leave me," said Charles Herbert, endeavouring to grasp her hand.

"I will not leave you. I will take care of you," she replied, soothingly, smoothing the rumpled pillows and adjusting the bed-clothes, as though Mr. Marchmont had not been present.

"Miss Herbert, I must insist upon your withdrawal. You do not know all that is at stake."

"You can tell me; if it concerns my father, it concerns me also."

For the moment Mr. Marchmont was

baffled: almost unconsciously to himself, that cold cynical man shrank from allowing her to see the sordid shabbiness of his soul. He did not wish her to see the profit that he purposed to himself from her father's position. It was a sentiment struggling against a matter of fact.

He walked up and down the room in displeased silence, whilst Constance sat beside her father, endeavouring to soothe and reassure him.

After the lapse of a short time, old Nanny came up, pale and trembling.

"Oh, Miss Constance! Miss Constance! What is to come of all this? There are men from Bow-street downstairs. They are come for the master, and to search the house."

Charles Herbert heard these terrible words, but he neither spoke nor moved,—he was struck with paralysis.

"Mr. Marchmont, look at my father, he is dying!" cried Constance, in an agony of terror.

"So much the better; there is nothing but disgrace, if, indeed, there be not a shameful death before him. You wished to know all. He was connected with the great bank robbery, and the officers are come here, upon information, to search the house for the stolen property."

Mr. Marchmont spoke bitterly; he was excessively annoyed at the turn matters had taken.

He went downstairs to the parlour, where the two officers had already commenced their search.

They were decent-looking men, with determined impassible countenances, of a peculiar cast, and eyes that took in everything around, without appearing to look at anything. They knew Mr. Marchmont, and

Mr. Marchmont knew them, extremely well. In a few words he told them all that had occurred, and that in the wounded man they would find the individual they wanted about the robbery, but that neither he nor Charles Herbert were in a condition just then to give any information.

The search began, and was conducted in the most scientific manner, but, of course, not a trace of the stolen property could be discovered. There remained only Charles Herbert's bed-room unsearched, and they proceeded thither. A certain feeling of humanity prompted them to leave that until the last.

John Scott had come at the summons of old Nanny. He was quite unaware of the presence of the officers in the house until they entered the bed-room; the distress of Constance and the critical state of her father absorbed his attention. Charles had

opened his eyes, and recovered in some measure his senses; but he could not speak, and the whole of one side was powerless.

“Who, what are these persons, Miss Herbert? It is as much as your father’s life is worth to be disturbed now, and they must not enter.”

Constance shook her head.

“They are officers of justice, Mr. Scott, let them do their duty. There is some fatal mystery; they will find nothing here.”

The two men looked at Charles, lying like one already dead, and at Constance. They felt as much pity as men habituated to do their duty and assist justice to take her course could feel, but it did not delay their proceedings for a moment.

“We are sorry to disturb you, Miss, but we are obliged. If you know of any secret place where the old gentleman keeps his

money and other matters, it might save time and some disturbance if you were to show us. It will make no difference in the end, for we shall be sure to find it."

"I know nothing of any secret place," said Constance, "and you will find nothing."

But as she spoke, a horrible spasm of recollection came over her. She remembered all the mysterious doings of her father when they first returned to the Chauntry,—how he had bricked up the door of his dressing-room,—all the jealousy he had shown of any one even entering the room—all that had ever struck her as strange in his manner; and the horrible conviction seized her that it was all connected with this business, and that the officers were on the right track!

All that had vaguely puzzled her about her father had now its explanation, and

the fixed idea which, as a child, had associated her father with "some crime committed," took away all surprise from this terrible moment. She knew that all was true!

All strength left her limbs; they hung loose and quivering with the keen agony that darted through her. She sunk down upon the bed in a waking trance, knowing all that passed, her senses quickened to a morbid consciousness, but entirely incapable of moving a finger.

The men rapidly examined all the drawers of the wardrobe, ransacked the old-fashioned bureau, and took it dexterously to pieces in search of secret drawers and double boards, but nothing appeared. Every article contained in it was subject to scrutiny. The furniture was examined to see if, by any possibility, anything could be secreted.

At length the officers approached the bed. Charles lay motionless, but his eyes were fixed with painful intentness upon the corner of the room where the bricked-up door was to him quite visible above the bookcase he had placed before it. One of the officers was struck with his look, and followed the direction of it.

"It is somewhere in that corner; see how he tries to look away now we are watching."

"Don't you see he is dying?" replied the other. "Folks always fix their eyes in that way. I have seen scores die, and they all do so. The property is stitched up in the mattress, depend on it."

"Anyway, let us see what there is in that corner first. He will be dead before we have done. Give him a chance to die in peace, if he can."

They moved the heavy bureau, assisted

by Mr. Marchmont, who felt an intense curiosity in the result of the search, although he was far from guessing how nearly it affected his own interest.

"There has been a door bricked up here, and no mistake," said one of the men. "It is not bricklayers' work this."

The bricks were speedily removed, and the door, securely fastened, stood revealed.

"We are coming to something now, I should say."

The door soon gave way; and they looked into a small, shallow dressing-room, or "powdering closet," as it was called, descending a step from the bed-room. It was quite dark, for the window had been bricked up. As their eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, they saw nothing but a very small fire-place, and a cupboard let into the wall, containing only an old empty hat-box. The men looked at each other with

rather blank faces; there was not a place where anything could be concealed, and the plentiful cobwebs that covered the walls gave evidence how long they had been undisturbed.

A tin saucepan, covered with rust, and nearly melted into a shapeless mass, attracted Mr. Marchmont's eye. It stood inside the bars, and all were rusty together.

"What is this?" said he, lifting it, and carrying it to the light. He scraped the sides with a knife, and looked at it curiously for some minutes.

"Here is proof, if you need any, there has been either gold or silver, or both, melted in this spot. There is something to be found here, depend on it. Fetch a candle, one of you."

A shining point gleamed from a crevice in the floor, as the candle was held about. It proved to be a small diamond, which had apparently been dropped and trodden in.

"We must take up the boards."

"The boards have never been touched since the house was a house," said Mr. Marchmont. "Look under the hearthstone; it is there a man would hide anything."

"No mason ever laid this hearthstone down, I'll be bound," said the elder officer, who was working energetically with a crow-bar.

The stone was prised up, and beneath was disclosed a lump of fused metal, covered with verdigris. A large, leathern bag lay carefully tied up and sealed, and a portfolio, which was nearly falling in pieces with damp. The officers uttered a cry of exultation as they clutched their prey.

Their cry was echoed by another, that proceeded from the bed-room, a dull, inarticulate, discordant sound, as though from one struggling in nightmare. There was something terribly frightful in it, for the

men laid down their prize to look whence it came. Charles Herbert, conscious, but helpless, endeavouring to struggle with his paralysis, had fallen off the bed; his face was so horribly distorted that none of those present dared to look upon him. With the cry they had heard, his spirit passed. Charles Herbert was dead.

John Scott, who had been assisting Nanny and another servant to remove Constance, returned hastily at the sound of that death-cry. The officers, accustomed as they were to sights calculated to try the nerves of ordinary men, were struck with horror; and the perspiration stood in beads upon the forehead of Mr. Marchmont, who was ghastly pale; the presence of Death had stilled all the interests of the passing moment.

Mr. Marchmont was the first to recover himself.

"He is quite dead, we have no time to bestow on him; place the body on the bed, and cover it over; no one must enter this room at present."

Mr. Marchmont had a singular horror of death; he would not have lent his assistance in touching the dead body for all the treasures that they had just discovered. He turned his back with a shudder he could not conceal, as the two strong officers lifted the poor emaciated corpse, decently composed the disturbed features, and drew the sheet over them.

"He has made a good escape out of all this."

"Well for him that he has; he has taken his secret where we can never find it."

Mr. Marchmont turned impatiently.

"Come, gentlemen, to business. John Scott, we have found what may concern you; come along."

On opening the leathern bag, all the precious stones were found as Charles had placed them: one ruby and sapphire cross was intact; he had spared it for Constance, when he might give it to her with safety; a label, written in a wavering hand, "To my dear daughter, when I am dead." In the portfolio were the ashes of half-consumed bank notes. Apparently his heart had failed him before they were destroyed; the numbers, in some instances, had escaped. On comparing them with the advertised list, they were found to correspond. The cross, too, answered to the description in the *Hue and Cry*.

"We have found the right nest, and the eggs in it," said one of the officers. "There will be pretty nearly all the property here."

"John Scott," said Mr. Marchmont, "this is the bank property, for the robbery

of which your father was so heavy a sufferer; you are in a fair way to have your name set fair again. I always thought him innocent."

The poor young man burst into tears.

"Oh, my God! my God! how I thank Thee!"

"I think we may come downstairs now," said Mr. Marchmont, uneasily; "we have left nothing that concerns any one; we can secure the closet door."

"But, Mr. Marchmont, you will have to come along with us; we cannot lose sight of you."

"What have I to do with all this? I know nothing."

"Possibly not, but read this; you will tell your own story in the right place; but you must come with us now."

Half-hidden in the torn cover of the portfolio, and partially consumed, was a

paper, in Charles Herbert's handwriting, containing the words, "Marchmont's share in notes and jewels."

Mr. Marchmont was petrified, as well he might be. There could be no mistake, the words were plainly written; it seemed a diabolical delusion; he knew himself entirely innocent—but how to prove it? The whole fair fabric of his carefully built-up fortune was threatened with ruin through the cunning malignity of a half-insane man.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE officers first ordered themselves a plentiful supply of refreshments, which the length and nature of their recent employment rendered peculiarly acceptable, and then they despatched a messenger to Chelmsford, for a post-chaise, and a medical man to certify as to the possibility of removing their prisoner.

Mr. Marchmont sat apart, chafing terribly at the new aspect things had taken. He did not for a moment entertain any fears as to the ultimate result to himself; but he knew that in the process of investi-

gation many transactions of his past life would inevitably be exposed which he had carefully shrouded from the light of day. He knew, too,—none better,—that a court of justice has a peculiar aptness for taking the shine of respectability out of even the most innocent events of daily life, and he felt that his dealings with Charles Herbert would bear a very shabby and questionable appearance when exposed in their unadorned reality.

All the beautiful respectability with which he had electrotyped the base metal of his life and proceedings was about to be melted off, and leave a sadly tarnished name and reputation. It was the only Nemesis that could have found him vulnerable, except indeed the loss of his money, which was so carefully invested, however, as to be secure from anything less than a revolution.

Whilst he was indulging in moody

reflections, which effectually ruffled the elaborate calmness he generally maintained under difficulties, old Nanny came trembling into the room. She looked many years older since the previous day. Her head shook as with palsy; all her features were relaxed, and hung loose and feeble; her eyes were red with weeping.

"Oh! Mr. Marchmont," said she, "you surely are not going to leave that poor young thing alone in this house, with nobody to direct or advise her? What is she to do?—what are any of us to do? Who is so fit as yourself to give the orders about the funeral?"

"My good Nanny, these gentlemen will tell you that I am obliged to go with them—that it does not depend upon me to refuse."

"But do you call yourself a Christian, and talk of going away, leaving us to live

or die, as it pleases God? The poor master always treated you as his friend, and will you leave him to be unburied like a dog? Who is to order about the burying, if you go away? A heathen would have more regard."

There was something so whimsical in Nanny's appeal, when taken in connexion with the actual circumstances, that the officers, albeit not given to seeing the ludicrous side of things, gave a chuckling laugh—not an ill-natured one, for they were really touched at the desolate, forlorn condition of poor Constance, and death had removed Charles Herbert from their charge.

"I tell you what, mistress, it is not altogether out of love and free-will that this gentleman accompanies us, or that we take him,—there is obligation on both sides; but if there is anything that can be done or ordered before we go, I am quite agreeable

to delay our journey. I always feel for females, I have daughters of my own. When there is anything wrong, the heaviest end of the weight is sure to fall on them."

"Ay," continued the other officer, "I have always seen it so. Why it should be, I do not know, unless it is one of the laws of nature, that the weakest must go to the wall."

"I don't know what is to be done," said Nanny, querulously, "I am sure. I cannot advise: there is no one to order how things should be done. I don't know what is to become of us: I wish we were all dead together!"

"Is there nobody at all you can think of, who would come and take the young lady away?"

"There is Mrs. Harrop, but she is a long way off; and Mr. Dellincourt, who was so good to us when Madam Margaret died, if he were here now he would see after things."

"Come, come, mistress, cheer up, and drink a drop of this to keep a heart in you. Where do they live?—could you not send for them?"

"They are a long way off—a very long way off," repeated Nanny, dolefully.

"Well, Mr. Marchmont will, may-be, write a letter for you; and as we shall pass through Chelmsford, I will send a decent fellow I know there to see after the funeral. He will do it well, and honestly. Your old master will be far better underground than above it, I can tell you, just now; so don't grieve after him."

"The master might have some curious ways, but he never was anything but a gentleman; and it is my belief, and always will be, that he was imposed upon by those who wanted their own ends with him!" said Nanny, looking wrathfully at Mr. Marchmont.

"Ah, indeed!" said the officer, pricking up his ears professionally; "and who imposed on him, do you think?"

"I don't know," said Nanny, in a sharp, suspicious tone; "and if I did, I am not going to say. But there are some who have made a tool of him, or no police-officers would have come near him to worry his last hours."

Mr. Marchmont had the grace to rouse himself from the contemplation of his own concerns, and to tell Nanny that if she would bring him the materials, he would write to Mrs. Harrop; and suggested that if John Scott were to take the letter, it would arrive much earlier than in the course of post, as they lived in a cross country.

"Well, he is a kind-hearted, soft sort of body, and maybe he would do it," said Nanny; "and I would pay his journey myself."

The letter was written, and after reading it carefully through, the officer said that John Scott might ride with them as far as London.

Nanny was still hurried and bewildered, but not quite so distracted. John Scott, on being appealed to, declared his readiness to go.

A few moments afterwards the noise of wheels was heard in the yard, and the medical man who had been sent for entered the room where the officers were sitting. One of them accompanied him to the loft, to ascertain the state of the wounded man, whilst the other remained to watch.

Mr. Marchmont, who maintained a sullen silence, feeling himself, as he did, in an extremely awkward and altogether false position for a man like him;—the consequences looked more and more doubtful and perplexing the longer he reflected upon what

had happened. The curses he mentally bestowed upon the memory of Charles Herbert were numerous and heartfelt, and it was very fortunate for him that his final destination did not depend upon Mr. Marchmont's recommendation.

When the doctor and the officer returned, the former gave it as his opinion that the wounded man might be safely removed. He had been more stunned than hurt, and the plentiful hæmorrhage that had ensued had been highly beneficial.

There remained, therefore, nothing to delay their departure. Mr. Marchmont and the other prisoner were placed in the chaise; the officers looked at their pistols before leaving the house; one of them mounted the front seat and the other got inside; whilst John Scott was left to drive the gig in which they had come down from London.

In this state Mr. Marchmont was driven away from the place where for so many years he had looked forward to establishing a Family that was to take root and flourish in the country, and achieve honours and wealth—the end of which, he had sometimes dreamed, might be—a peerage in the next generation!

The old Chauntry was once more left in silence, with the last of its long line of masters lying safe in death—that sanctuary whence no warrant could drag him forth, and whither no human inquisition could pursue him.

The doctor and old Nanny returned to the bedside of Constance, who had as yet exhibited no signs of consciousness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN Constance opened her eyes after her long fit of insensibility, Nanny and the doctor were standing beside her bed, anxiously watching her; at one time they almost feared that she would never wake more. She looked vacantly around, her memory was completely gone for the time, she did not even recognise Nanny.

"It is as well, quite as well it should be so," said the doctor, "her whole system has received a shock from which it will not readily recover, and it is as well that her

recollection should be shrouded for the present. She must be kept very quiet, and nothing to startle or to recal the past must come near her. Poor young creature, she has suffered greatly. Has she no friends or relatives to take charge of her?"

"As for friends, I cannot say," grumbled old Nanny; "I will tell you when they have proved themselves. Them as should have stood by her in her trial, have gone away like snow in summer. We have sent for some who have promised fair; but I tell you what, I begin to misdoubt all the world; I don't believe there is one person in it who is what they seem; I used to trust in God, and believe that He took care of folks, but seeing what I have seen, I have changed my mind. I believe in the Devil, for he seems to get it all his own way here, now-a-days."

The doctor, a formal matter-of-fact

Scotchman, without a grain of ideality, who took everything literally, was much shocked at poor Nanny's confession of faith.

"I hope your mistress does not share your sentiments. You are much mistaken in your estimate of things, I do assure you; such ideas are quite wrong. However," he continued, himself turning his back upon Nanny in disgust, "you will see and give her one of these powders every three hours, and if she should become at all excited, you will administer one of these doses of musk. She will need great care and constant watching; she must not be left alone for a moment."

Having delivered these instructions in a dry and somewhat displeased manner, he took his departure, promising to return the next day. He turned back to say to Nanny, who had followed him downstairs:

"Keep the funeral from her, whatever you do, and get it over quickly."

"Yes, sir," said Nanny, curtseying. She wished to tell him that she was not such a reprobate as he had judged her, but he was gone before she could begin her speech.

Madame Guyon says, in those strange records of Spiritual Experience, that only when people are stripped of everything, even of themselves, and of all the qualities that seemed most precious—when they are dead to all hope and comfort—spiritually gone to dissolution, then, and then only, are they in the condition to rise again to a higher life than the one they have lost. There is a profound truth in this mysticism, deeper than what the mere words convey. All who have experienced trials will recognise the meaning that lies in them.

Constance at this moment was touching the lowest deep of earthly desolation and bereavement; she was stripped bare of all human comfort; her life, seen from whatever point of view, looked a barren and lonely waste; not a blade of hope or the faintest glow of human happiness could be discerned in any quarter: even old Nanny wished in her heart that she might die, and be buried with her father, and so the whole family be laid at rest together.

The preparations for the funeral were hastened as much as possible; nothing beyond what was strictly needful to lay him beneath the ground was attempted. All was ready by the time that the family vault in the old churchyard at In-gatstone could be opened to receive him.

On the second day after his miserable death, Charles Herbert, without a single

friend to follow him to the grave, was carried forth from the home of his fathers, and laid beside them in their last resting-place.

A cold dull mist wrapped both earth and sky; the clergyman shuffled hastily and lazily through the service; which was not to be wondered at, for he was an old man, and the small drizzling rain penetrated to the very marrow of his bones. It was as dreary an inauguration into the invisible world as could well be conceived.

The necessary forms were dispatched; the fees paid, the few stragglers who had collected in the churchyard to see the Squire buried, dispersed, making their comments upon the change of times, and the sexton was left alone to finish his work.

For several days no tidings of any sort reached the Chauntry; it seemed altogether abandoned by the world without. Con-

stance still continued in a placid, dreamy state of half consciousness, which the doctor declared was partly the result of his medicines, and that she was going on well. But poor old Nanny was nearly worn out with grief and anxiety.

It was the fourth day after the funeral, and Nanny was sitting beside Constance, who had dropped asleep in trying to read her Bible, and wondering why it gave her no comfort, when the door opened softly, and John Scott, with his dress splashed up to the neck, stood beckoning to her on the threshold. She cast a hasty glance at the bed to see if Constance were awakened, and then came forward.

“Oh! thank God, Mr. Scott, that you are come back; I thought surely some evil had happened to you; but how came you back alone? Where is Mrs. Harrop?”

John Scott explained that the roads were so bad and heavy with the rain, as to be almost impassable, and that he had ridden forward to tell her that all was well, and that Mr. and Mrs. Harrop were both on the way. He looked ill and wan with fatigue; indeed, the truth was, that he had scarcely eaten or slept since his departure.

“Oh! Mr. Scott, but you have been a good friend to us! But now sit you down and eat a mouthful, for you need it. I hope now, please God, we will wear a way through our troubles. But if that poor lass is ever raised up again, she will never be as she was before.”

Whilst he ate, Nanny told him all that had happened in his absence, which was a great comfort to her; her enforced silence having been a greater trouble than she at all suspected, and it was such a relief to

find that they were not destitute of people who cared for them: things already, to Nanny, looked brighter.

The next day brought Mr. and Mrs. Harrop, who proved themselves true friends. Mr. Harrop made at once all the arrangements for winding up the family affairs. John Scott was left in possession of the house on behalf of Mr. Marchmont, to whom it appeared the very furniture also belonged, except a few personalities that had been Margaret's. Constance was spared all the pain of taking leave of familiar objects, or, indeed, from all knowledge of what was going on. By the end of a week everything was arranged, and the doctor declared Constance able to be removed. In spite of his cold, dry manner, he was glad that friends had at length appeared to take charge of the poor young creature.

Everything was in readiness, and Constance, wrapped in a large cloak, was lifted into the carriage, and the ill-starred Chauntry was left behind to strangers.

CHAPTER XIX.

WE must now return a little to Mr. Marchmont; he has had so much influence over the individuals in this story, that some account of his subsequent life and proceedings is indispensable to its completeness.

He was brought up before the sitting magistrate at Bow-street, who was a personal acquaintance of his own, and a man who had been in the habit of dining at his house. It was with lively astonishment that the worthy magistrate saw Mr. March-

mont in such a situation, and could scarcely believe his ears when he heard what was the occasion; but as the solicitor for the prosecution applied for a remand, and in the evidence contrived to ferret out various facts connected with Mr. Marchmont's earlier career, which proved his intimate dealings on various occasions with John Maryland, the writer of the letter found in Charles Herbert's bed-room, a case of suspicion was made out against him to justify his being committed to Newgate to take his trial as accessory to the robbery. Mr. Marchmont, by the advice of his solicitor, and the dictates of his own shrewdness, "reserved his defence" until it should appear a little more clearly the shape the indictment would take, and he was committed to Newgate accordingly.

Many men who little expected it, both rogues and honest men, have at various

times found themselves within the walls of Newgate; but perhaps none were ever more astonished at such a phenomenon than Mr. Marchmont.

A man walking through the world, like that description of "intrepid virtue" which all the world has read in the "Economy of Human Life," "with his head erect above the clouds," and his feet trampling firmly upon the "tiger flinging itself across his path," and stepping suddenly there and then over the edge of a precipice which he had not perceived, would perhaps be the only individual likely to understand the full extent of Mr. Marchmont's feelings under the unexpected combination of circumstances which had sent him to Newgate!

He knew himself to be innocent of all knowledge of the transaction; but it was because he was in this instance completely the victim of a moral casualty that he felt

his faith in himself shaken. In the early part of his career, when "to put money in his purse" was the chief object of his life, he had done several things which, however they might be mitigated by the phrase of "sharp practice," were far too questionable in their details to make investigation at all desirable.

He had in those days piqued himself on keeping the law at arm's length; but most men have some page in their history which, although it may throw great light upon their character, is generally suppressed as "not reading well in their biography;" so Mr. Marchmont, with all his caution, had been no exception to this rule. Years ago—so many that he chose to consider them beyond the meridian of memory—he had been engaged with John Maryland in a transaction which, although not morally worse than many others in which he had been

a principal, had a more ugly and indictable shape: it concerned the affairs of a certain canal company, and had been highly profitable—indeed, it was the first important lift on his road to riches that Mr. Marchmont had met with.

He had quarrelled with John Maryland subsequently: he had endeavoured to ruin him, and had failed. He now found himself, after a lapse of years, the companion of this man in a criminal indictment! Who could calculate the damage that a vindictive accomplice might inflict? This was the source of Mr. Marchmont's anxiety. His great hope was that John Maryland might continue to keep safe out of the reach of justice.

A trifling incident added to his uneasiness. His precious morsel of Queen Anne gold, the talisman in which he placed more faith than he would have owned to himself,

slipped one day from his fingers, as he was in the act of replacing it in its receptacle, and rolled into a rat-hole before his eyes, whence no efforts of his could redeem it!

He endeavoured to persuade himself that it was not *really* of the slightest consequence, beyond the annoyance of losing a coin he had kept so long; but reason was vain—it fell on his spirits like an omen that his good fortune had deserted him, and he could not shake it off.

The clever solicitor to whom he had committed the care of his defence was surprised to see the loss of confidence in a man like Mr. Marchmont, and began to doubt in his secret mind whether, after all, justice had not got hold of the right criminal.

The trial was postponed, in the hope of entrapping other parties connected with the

robbery; and, by the curious fatality which so often brings criminals into the very den of justice, John Maryland actually ventured over to England to negotiate the reward, and was apprehended. The others who were implicated were also secured, and the trial came on.

So far as regarded Mr. Marchmont, the grand jury ignored the indictment against him, and he was immediately set at liberty; but the evil he feared overtook him, nevertheless.

His old acquaintance and deadly enemy, John Maryland, chose to conduct his own defence; not from any hope he entertained of obtaining an acquittal, but for the opportunity that it afforded him of some revenge upon Mr. Marchmont. He knew his vulnerable points, and had him into the witness-box, for no other reason than by irrelevant questions, and by abusing the latitude accorded

to a man making his own defence, he contrived not only to publish the fact of their former intercourse, but to elicit the nature of his hold over Charles Herbert; and though frequently reprimanded for consuming the time of the Court in useless digressions, before he sat down he had irremediably disfigured the fair face of Mr. Marchmont's respectability, which was all he aimed at.

It was not an entire consolation to Mr. Marchmont that in those days the reward of burglary was hanging; nor even that John Maryland and his companions were not to be defrauded of their due. He came out of court that day feeling that everybody knew him for the hard, bad, cruel, and above all, the *low-born* man he was; and he had not the comfort of the shelter of the slightest self-deception as to the exceeding unsightly object he appeared. He saw

himself, for the first time in his life, with the eyes of others. His worst enemy—the man whom he might have injured the most bitterly—would have felt amply revenged, could he have known his feelings that day!

The reflected dishonour that would fall upon his son affected him even more than the mortification to himself. That young man, however, showed himself quite capable of taking care of himself, and certainly did not fall a victim to his filial piety.

He was shocked and annoyed beyond measure at the disclosures which had taken place. The stone had fallen plump into the very midst of the beautiful glass-house in which he dwelt before the eyes of society, viz., the position in the fashionable world into which he had climbed in right of his own merits and his wife's connexions. THE CHAUNTRY, of which he had been so proud, had proved a fatal dowry!

He was, however, not entirely unequal to the emergency. He took the course of separating himself entirely from his father in popular opinion, by declaring loudly his own great scandal and distress at what had transpired; he lamented pathetically the curse entailed upon ill-gotten wealth, and made a parade of atoning for it by handsome donations to all the charities most conspicuous to the public eye. Also, he built and endowed a row of alms-houses—which was less expensive and looked quite as well as if he had built a church; he laid a threefold varnish of respectability over his own proceedings; he signified to his father that henceforth he could hold no intercourse with him, and altogether conducted himself with the most hard-hearted skill and propriety imaginable under such difficult circumstances.

There was hope for him that after awhile

(if he did not lose his property) he might again come to be looked upon with complacency, and the affair, if recollected at all, excite a certain sympathy that so respectable a man should have had such a rascal for his father.

Mr. Marchmont did not entirely disapprove of this conduct. He recognised it as the best course possible under the circumstances, and as a touch of his own genius. To do him justice, he was very glad that his son should make good his own position; but he did hope that the official act of social repudiation would be accompanied by a few filial assurances and consolations administered in secret. He was quite willing to be sacrificed ostensibly, but he desired and expected a few marks of affection from his son, as a thirsty man, lying sick and helpless, desires a draught of water; but they never came, and Mr. Marchmont

went away from England, a disheartened and miserable man.

He changed his name; but his evil genius seemed to have obtained the rule over him. It seemed to him as though the birds of the air must whisper of his identity; for go where he would, he was recognised, and he had become morbidly susceptible. He was not a worse man than he had always been, but his success had departed from him: he held himself aloof from everybody, and fancied that he was avoided. The sense of isolation preyed upon him, until one day he attempted to cut his throat. As if he were destined to fail now in whatever he undertook, he did not cut it effectually, he only succeeded in inflicting a ghastly wound, and was discovered and subjected to medical treatment, which restored him to life with an ugly contraction of the muscles of the neck, which

naturally attracted the attention of all who saw him. The rumour of his attempted suicide, coupled with his solitary mode of life, added another shadow of ill omen to his presence, and people grew silent, or whispered together when he appeared.

He was an entirely miserable man, and as a last resource, took to drinking. It did not make him any happier, nor procure him any more social intercourse with his fellow-creatures. He had never possessed any genial or jovial qualities, and people naturally shrank from receiving an attempted suicide as a boon companion. He subsided into a melancholy, solitary sot, and after dragging out a few miserable years, he finally died at an obscure market-town in France, of *delirium tremens*.

Phillip Marchmont and his wife attempted to establish themselves at the

Chauntry, after the exposure of the trial had died out, succeeded by the over-growth of many new scandals. The feeling against them in the neighbourhood was, however, too strong for them to stem. None of the country families called upon them, or would take the slightest notice of them. The old resident gentry bitterly resented that they had ever been induced to receive the father, and it was some consolation to their ruffled feelings to visit his sins upon the son. They felt indignant, too, as at a personal injury, that such upstarts should have rooted out and dispossessed the rightful family. In their disgust to the name of Marchmont, they quite overlooked all that Charles Herbert had done to bring his misfortunes upon his own head.

After a short attempt to stand their ground, Phillip Marchmont and his wife left the country. The Chauntry lands were

offered for sale, and were purchased by the proprietor of the adjacent estate as a provision for his younger son, who was going to be married.

But a melancholy tradition was associated with the house. After the discovery of the stolen treasures, and Charles Herbert's death, it was reported to be haunted: strange noises were heard there, and old Gilbert Herbert and his idiot son were said to haunt their old rooms. The house looked more lonely and dream-like than ever. The architect who was consulted as to the possibility of giving it a more cheerful aspect, discovered that the dry rot had made extensive progress in the walls and rafters; it was, therefore, sentenced to be pulled down.

Some vestiges of Margaret's flower-garden, the "Nun's Walk," and the avenue of lime trees, with some ruins

of the old gateway, still exist; but the old Chauntry itself has passed away, though the tradition of it is still preserved amongst the country people.

CHAPTER XX.

CONSTANCE continued for the remainder of that year an inmate with Mrs. Harrop. That excellent woman showed herself still, as formerly, the same tender, wise, and understanding friend. Whilst with her, Constance gradually recovered her health, which had been so rudely shaken; and with her health, the tone of her spirits and character became firm and calm. The dark clouds of her past life had cleared off, leaving a clear quiet sky behind them, and she stood on the threshold of a new life and new duties.

Her whole nature appeared to have undergone a change. Her character had become formed and firmly knit. The vague aspirations and restless dreams of youth had gone; but with them had departed also all the vain hopes which, in their brightness and disappointment, are the tax laid by Nature upon the buoyancy of youth.

She had suffered so much, that henceforth she could know no fear. She knew that nothing could be harder to endure than what had already been laid upon her, and this security is no bad exchange for the fitful happiness of passionate emotion; those who possess it, have purchased it too dearly not to know its worth. In person she had grown lovelier than ever; her large grave sweet eyes had a calm out-looking expression, as though they saw better things afar off. She was like one

who, after being shattered by pain and sickness, arises refreshed, and made whole out of a deep sleep.

The first instinct of her recovered strength was to take up her life, and to do the work that naturally fell to her lot. She was not objectless in life. She had, on the contrary, a very clearly-defined position, and plenty of occupation urgently awaiting her attention. Her place in Yorkshire must be her home, and her presence there was greatly needed.

When she first spoke of departure, Mrs. Harrop endeavoured to dissuade her. She had hoped that she would always remain with them, and spoke eloquently of the pleasure and comfort it would be for them all to live together. But her husband agreed with Constance, and strengthened her resolution. "If she had property, she must do her duty by it," he said; and

he thought Constance one of the most enviable women in the world, to be able to manage her estate for herself, and have all her own way as though she were a man. Of course, the oftener she came to see them, and the longer she stopped with them, the better pleased he would be; but she must stand in her own place, and take up her rightful position.

There was no more to be said. In the beginning of spring, Constance prepared to depart from her kind friends. Mr. Harrop was to accompany her, and it was agreed that later in the year Mrs. Harrop should come and stop with her as long as her husband would spare her—until, indeed, he came to fetch her; and this prospect took away much of the present pain of separation. Nanny, of course, went with Constance; she had greatly recovered her health and strength during these blessed months of rest.

Left alone in her own house, Constance at first felt depressed and lonely, but she was surprised to find how much she carried her own world about with her: so different to what it had been formerly, when it was other people and the place where they dwelt that made the objects of her own life.

She soon took root in new life, it had the real secret of a home in it; she was needed there—she could not go away elsewhere without something suffering or being neglected by her absence; and that is a delicate flattery to one's self-love and sense of duty at the same time, which seldom appeals in vain. There were as many country neighbours, and as much friendly intercourse, as she desired; accustomed as she had been to the life of the Chauntry, she did not feel the desire for anything more in the shape of gaiety or society.

Her lot was certainly, to all outward appearance, calm and prosperous; those who did not know her history might have thought it almost too free from ordinary vexations and troubles to endure; but she had the drawback always exacted by Fate from all human prosperity. She had days of darkness, during which she was like the picture of Faithful, in "Pilgrim's Progress," passing in doubt, and dread, and desolate despondency, through the valley of the shadow of death, a narrow footing alone dividing her from the madness that lurked in the shadowy depths on either side.

These seasons were not of long duration, but she felt always conscious of the dark presence that might at any moment descend and overshadow her beneath its fearful wings.

To compensate, however, for these times

of gloom, the intervening periods were so bright and cheerful, that whilst they lasted it was as though she could never know sorrow more.

During the lucid intervals she enjoyed everything intensely; she seemed to enter into the very marrow of life. The knowledge that it was liable to be overshadowed only made her time of brightness more vivid.

As she advanced in life these seasons of blackness came less frequently, and endured for a shorter time; but they never entirely ceased to visit her. They served to remind her that she had not made the sacrifice of her life needlessly. She was *at one* with herself. Once for all she had accepted the conditions of her life, and she enjoyed the peace that never fails to follow an entire obedience to whatever has been revealed to us "as meet, right, and our bounden duty."

She looked calmly back, and could recognise that when she imagined at the time she had been making an immense sacrifice, she had, in fact, been only making a great escape ; and very thankful she was that she had not been allowed to marry such an entirely selfish man.

But when she renounced him, she renounced what she candidly believed to be all the happiness that could ever be offered to her. She loved him with all the energy of her nature, and she renounced him in obedience to a sense of a higher obligation than personal happiness. She had done so without hesitation, and without any weak endeavour to reconcile self-indulgence with self-denial. That sacrifice of self, once made, was effectual for ever. Never, through the whole course of her after-life, did any storm of human passion come near to harass her.

In early life, with an entire and perfect heart, she had renounced the gratification of an intense affection, and all idea of ever loving or being beloved again; and because that act was perfect—not made with a treacherous or divided mind—she had REST in her soul. It is the divided heart that makes the misery and restlessness of life.

A short time after Constance left Mrs. Harrop, her mother died, somewhat suddenly; but it was a deliverance that could only be welcome, for the sake of all parties.

Mrs. Harrop had two children,—a boy and a girl, and as the estate Constance enjoyed came through Mrs. Harrop's ill-starred nephew, it was only reasonable and natural that it should revert to the family. Constance adopted for her heir her young namesake and godchild, who was allowed to spend part of every year with her.

There was no danger that the heart or affections of Constance should lie dormant or go to rust.

Old Nanny died at an advanced age, quite reconciled and contented with the lot that had been appointed to her darling Constance.

Mr. and Mrs. Harrop lived long and happily together. She once said to her husband,—

“If I had died of a broken heart, or gone into a convent when I was disappointed of marrying Charles, Herbert what a number of good things I should have lost! My dear, I am grown quite an old woman; but, upon my honour, I am very glad to find myself alive!”

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We bid them farewell in the quaint words of Harry Martin, which he wrote by way of an epitaph of himself,

“Reader, if you my words will only trust,
You'll gladly do and suffer all you must.”

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